

Local environmental sustainability

Edited by
Susan Buckingham and Kate Theobald



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Local environmental sustainability

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1

Building alliances for local environmental sustainability

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1.1 The context for local environmental sustainability

In the UK, environmental sustainability has, arguably, been driven not by national government, but by the twin pressures of supra-national and local organisations. At the global level, the most highly publicised impetus has been the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the most enduring outcome of which appears to have been the local and national variants of Agenda 21 (Osborn and Bigg, 1998; United Nations, 2001). However, also significant is the fact that every United Nations Conference now requires consideration of environmental matters, which has implications for national governments legislating on issues as diverse as poverty, women and housing. As this book was going to press, world leaders were convening in South Africa for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to address new and continuing environmental problems as well as to review progress made on ameliorating those identified in 1992. In some respects, these subsequent conferences and the discussions held therein signal how far understanding and acceptance of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘environmental sustainability’ have come in the past ten years. Environmental sustainability and sustainable development discourse is now commonplace, even if it is not always well understood. (The term environmental sustainability is used here to signify a particular aspect of the broader sustainable development debate, where the former refers specifically to measures to ensure that the environment is not depleted or damaged further than it has already been, and the latter encompasses a broader range of social economic and environmental goals. Whilst the definition of these terms continues to be

contested, Myerson and Rydin's 1996 paper gives a good overview of the terms' rhetoric. See also Chapter 11.) In contrast to this, on many of the indicators identified in 1992, there has been little progress to date, and some conditions have worsened, although ten years may be a short time period on which to judge these (Buckingham-Hatfield and Walker, 2002; Desai, 2001; Glass, 2002 and Velasquez, 2000).

The other high profile environmental issue to have emerged from the UN is, of course, climate change, although it has been much more difficult to legislate as the events leading up to and beyond the Kyoto Conference in 1997 testify (Grubb, with Vrolijk and Brack, 1999). Whilst there are severe limitations to the Kyoto Agreement on Climate Change, nevertheless it is a significant driver of environmentally linked policy, particularly in the European Union and its member states. For the UK, the most pressing supra-national driver of change regarding environmental legislation is undoubtedly the EU which, from the inception of its first Environmental Framework programme in 1972, signified its intention to harmonise and strengthen environmental controls across member states. This has been successively tightened through the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, both in response to global pressures and in an attempt to create a level playing field for business, a better quality of life for citizens and a system in which the actions of one member state should not negatively affect the environment of another. Additionally, environmental concerns have been at the forefront of discussions for entry to the EU of the accession countries.

The influence of the EU has been felt through both individual directives (such as on environmental impact assessment, packaging and waste, water quality and recycling) and through general commitments to principles such as subsidiarity, the 'polluter pays' principle and carbon savings. Some of the influence of the EU has derived from its increasing stature as an international negotiator at, for example, UNCED and the Kyoto Conference, acting somewhat as a counterbalance to the increasingly intransigent USA. Whilst UN treaties and protocols have little legal standing, EU legislation binds member states and must therefore drive policy making at the national level, and much of the UK's environmental legislation is a result of this (as Chapter 7 on recycling discusses). In addition, the EU Court of Appeal offers a site to which environmental campaigners can and do appeal if they feel that existing laws and policies are not being complied with. This has often been used by national environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who are another effective pressure on government to be more environmentally attentive.

Within the UK, the relatively new regional level of governance has concern for 'sustainable development', although the role of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) is limited and, being non-elected, the agencies are not democratically accountable. Chapter 2, on the role of the UK's

RDAs in climate change prevention, details their capacity. The real energy behind environmental policy and initiatives, then, when it does not emerge from the supra-national level, emanates from a range of local organisations, from local government and from civil society: NGOs, communities of interests and local communities.

Notwithstanding this, there is an inter-relationship between different geographical scales which is both highly complex and not always very clear. For example, the (Local) Agenda 21 programme agreed at Rio was in large part a result of the pressure and innovation of local, national and international NGOs working across international boundaries at the preparatory committees (prepcoms) to forge an initiative which would, through the international community, require signatories to take concrete actions for environmental sustainability. It is, therefore, not always appropriate or entirely meaningful to categorise environmental organisations or influences by their geographical scale. Having said that, this is precisely what this book intends to do. The editors are interested in the ways in which local initiatives (whether from local government, local partnerships or local communities) are able to make a difference to the local environment (and, collectively, environments further afield). Of particular interest is the way in which these local initiatives are articulated with (mostly local) government and how this works in different places and contexts; this will be explored in more depth later. Whilst local government has many limitations (for example, its capacity to act is severely constrained by central government funding and legislation, and its democratic legitimacy is strained by low voter turn out at local elections), it is still the only democratic force at the local level and, as such, is important in ensuring that local initiatives have the widest benefits, and in protecting the interests of the weakest. This argument is developed further in Chapter 11.

1.2 Local government

During the ten years since the Earth Summit, the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have become declared policy objectives at local, national and international levels, as enshrined in the Agenda 21 document (UNCED, 1992). Whilst national and supra-national governments clearly have a central role in the pursuit of sustainable development, it is equally clear that local government plays a crucial part. Local authorities are agents for implementing national and international policy; they can act as initiators of new ideas and approaches (from within the institution) but they also have the capacity to facilitate and support local community action and initiatives for environmental sustainability.

The formal agreement to Local Agenda 21 (LA21), Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, is a brief document (around three pages) which outlines the

broad principles of LA21. The first paragraph headed 'Basis for Action' is of particular importance, since this established the central role of local authorities in the process of sustainable development:

28.1. Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and co-operation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub-national environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilising and responding to the public to promote sustainable development. (UNCED, 1992)

Paragraph 3 defines the process for achieving local sustainable development:

28.3. Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organisations and private enterprises and adopt 'a Local Agenda 21'. Through consultation and consensus-building, local authorities would learn from citizens and from local, civic, community, business and industrial organisations and acquire the information needed for formulating the best strategies. The process of consultation would increase household awareness of sustainable development issues. Local authority programmes, policies, laws and regulations to achieve Agenda 21 objectives would be assessed and modified, based on local programmes adopted. Strategies could also be used in supporting proposals for local, national, regional and international funding. (UNCED, 1992)

Local Agenda 21 Principles (see Box 1.1) emphasise that local authorities need to make considerable changes, both to their policy making approaches in order to incorporate the perspectives and views of a range of sectors in the locality, and to the ways in which they interact with a range of groups and individuals in the policy process. Implicit in this is an assumption that local authorities need to work in partnership with a range of agencies in order to deliver sustainable development, and that it is possible for such partnerships to be effective. Furthermore, it is assumed that local government is in a position to provide effective education and training for all sectors, in order to improve the level of awareness of sustainable development. Evidence of the important role that local government has played, and should continue to play, in delivering environmental sustainability will be presented by prominent international local government organisations such as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Box 1.1 Local Agenda 21 Principles, as characterised by ICLEI¹

- The integration of issues: environmental objectives are linked with economic and social objectives.
- The integration of interests: in a culture of dialogue and participation, all groups in society are to be involved.
- Its long term character: measures and projects are based on long-term objectives keyed to the precautionary principle.
- Its global dimension: impacts of local action on global development are measured, ways of counteracting the global unequal distribution of consumption and wealth are identified. The local contribution to global sustainability is an explicit goal.
- Sustainable management of resources: utilisation of natural resources is based upon the rate at which new resources are formed; substance inputs into the natural regime are based on its capacity to degrade them.

Source: ICLEI (1998).

¹ The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) is the international environmental agency for local governments whose mission is 'to build and serve a worldwide movement of local governments to achieve and monitor tangible improvements in global environmental conditions through cumulative local actions'.

1.2.1 Operationalising environmental sustainability at local level

Lafferty and Coenen (2001) identify different modes of LA21 implementation that have been adopted since the mid-1990s – and suggest that the 'external or fragmented' mode is the most common type, whereby LA21 is parcelled out as sub-group projects, within traditional small-scale environmental areas, for example, composting and school projects. For Lafferty and Coenen:

... the fragmented nature of the involvement and the lack of integration among projects, and between projects and major political and economic decisions, point to relatively narrow and superficial change. (2001: 295)

However, it is also appropriate to consider the importance of the cumulative impact of environmental projects and initiatives, which even if not explicitly aimed to contribute to all dimensions of sustainable development, may be addressing different elements, for example 'community identity', and involvement in environmental/social improvements at a local level (by a range of 'stakeholder' groups).

In theory, there are a number of ways in which local authorities can meet the requirements of environmental sustainability (or more broadly sustainable development). Policy areas such as procurement, environmental management and audit, green transport plans and waste minimisation all present opportunities for local authorities to operate within a framework for sustainability. For instance in the UK, the recent requirement for local authorities to charge a landfill tax, and to produce and implement 'green' transport plans are two such examples. Across many countries and local authorities in Europe, there is evidence of a shift towards the adoption of environmentally-friendly approaches to transport and mobility, particularly in terms of provisions for pedestrians and cyclists, and the use of less polluting vehicles. However, there is less progress to date in the adoption of land-use plans and policies that place sustainability principles at the centre, a point which is developed in Chapter 12. Local authorities are introducing a range of policy initiatives to improve energy efficiency, and increasingly are supporting, and in some cases investing in, alternative sources of energy. There is also a gradual shift towards a 'think global, act local' approach, although in many cases policies which clearly impact on global sustainability, such as reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, are still focused on the local level.

The possibilities for pursuing policies that support and contribute to environmental sustainability need, however, to be considered within the wider context of the capacity/freedom to act and resources that local government possesses. In a recent extensive survey of progress with LA21 in Europe under the Fifth Framework programme of the European Commission (Evans and Theobald, 2001), it was found that the extent to which local authorities are able to make appropriate decisions for a sustainable future is perceived as fairly high in some respects in countries across Europe, with the opportunities provided by self-governance playing an important part in this in Scandinavia and Central/Eastern European countries in particular. However, local authorities acknowledge that the level of understanding both in local authorities and in the wider community is fairly low. Thus the institutional capacity within local government to address the requirements of sustainable development, needs to be further developed and strengthened.

The UK case provides an example of the tensions between top-down prescriptive policies from central government, and locally-led strategies and policies (both for environmental sustainability, and across all areas of service delivery).

During the past 10–15 years, local government's role has been changing from that of direct service provider (whereby local authorities had the power to decide to use local firms as suppliers of goods, and positively to encourage those firms to introduce environmentally and socially benign practices). In the UK at least, a series of re-organisations has reduced the

functions, powers and resources of local authorities, so that they have much less potential for either direct action or influence than in the past. In particular the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) during the 1980s in UK local government had a major impact on the capacity of local authorities to address social and environmental aspects of policy making, through, for example, ethical purchasing policies or more environmentally sustainable practices (Theobald, 1999). CCT placed lowest cost at the heart of decisions on service provision, and although local authorities have found ways to circumvent the prescriptive nature of CCT legislation (through carefully worded contract specifications) much of the literature highlights concerns about the pressure to accept low bids (from private contractors and in-house workforces) and cut back on service quality.

Research by Theobald (1999) revealed the detrimental effects of CCT on local authorities' abilities to address the requirements of sustainable development, for instance through a neglect of environmental and social criteria in contracts, and a reduction in the level and quality of service provision in key environmental service areas.

Since the late 1990s, a revised framework for service provision in the form of 'Best Value' has attempted to address many of the problems and restrictions of CCT, in particular removing the compulsory element in terms of purchasing policies and procurement. In practice, local authorities are still operating within strict guidelines on providing 'cost-effective' service delivery.

UK Government rhetoric, enshrined in the legislative framework of Best Value, emphasises its commitment to bring sustainable development into the heart of local government policy making by decentralising power, reinvigorating democracy, engaging local communities and encouraging integrated working. The Government is seeking, as part of this 'modernisation' agenda, to get local government to establish sustainable development as a core policy principle through both the Best Value and Community Strategy approaches. The key elements of Best Value and Community Strategies are briefly detailed below. These are worth stating as they have implications for the role and capacity of local government in delivering sustainable development.

Best Value

The Best Value framework requires local authorities to deliver services to clear standards by the 'most effective, economic and efficient means available'. Through legislation it places a duty on local authorities to be more accountable to local people and to have a responsibility to central government within the broader national interest. Its objectives, according to central government, are to help councils address the cross-cutting issues such as sustainable development – issues which are beyond the reach of a single service or service provider. According to the Government, local

authorities have been given the role of ‘community leader’ using partnerships and co-operation to ensure the services received are the ones that the locality needs and expects (DETR, 1999).

Under Best Value, each local authority is required to publish an annual Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), which is the principal public document that identifies each authority’s assessment of its past and current performance. These are measured against indicators – nationally and locally defined standards and targets set through a consultation process by the Government.

Boyne (1999) states that a number of local authorities are concerned about the objectives of the ‘Best Value’ concept and how it translates in practice. He argues there is

... a clear tension between local and central accountability ... [and] the presence of centrally specified indicators and targets may direct the attention of local politicians and managers upwards to government rather than outwards to local communities. (1999: 4)

The threat of central government intervention could lead local authorities to ‘cherry pick’ areas where they know they will be within government guidelines and ignore or set low targets in areas where they may fall short. There is already evidence that this is undermining the development of integrated policy making for environmental sustainability in terms of a lack of cross-departmental working, short-termism, and a lack of innovative policy making.

Community Strategies

New legislation which requires the production of a Community Strategy is inextricably linked to the delivery of a local authority’s Best Value report:

Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 places on principal local authorities a duty to prepare ‘community strategies’, for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. (DETR, 2000: para 1)

The legislation outlines four objectives that must be met in Community Strategies. They are intended:

- to allow local communities (based on geography and/or interest) to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities;
- to co-ordinate the actions of the council, and of the public, private, voluntary and community organisations that operate locally;
- to focus and shape existing and future activity of those organisations so that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations; and
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely, with local goals and priorities relating, where appropriate, to regional, national and even global aims.

Thus, the delivery of these Strategies should have a beneficial impact on the implementation of environmentally sustainable policies, and should also enhance the relationship between a local authority and civil society. Local authorities are advised that ‘only by working together with other public, private business and voluntary bodies will it [be] possible to deliver the broad range of outcomes encompassed by community strategies’ (DETR, 2000: para 17). The following section looks at ways in which local government can work with the wider local community to meet these objectives.

1.3 The local state and local civil society: partnerships for environmental sustainability

A central concern of this book is to explore the ways in which local government interacts with elements of civil society to create environmental initiatives. In a positive and productive way, local government can give local initiatives valuable support and security (whether legislative, financial or practical), ensuring that the initiative can be sustained beyond the lifetime of the charismatic innovator so often critical for getting the project off the ground. However, local government also sometimes fails to nurture projects which have the potential to contribute to environmental sustainability, or worse, to support actions that run counter to this potential. Decisions which undermine the viability of local shops and increase car dependence are well known examples of this. Often it is not a single decision (nor a single decision-making body) which creates this, but a process of cumulative decision-making in which connections are not made between each individual decision. The community response to this will vary depending on its particular set of social and geographical circumstances. In some cases the response is resignation (to use the car more often, or internet shopping – providing the technologies are available); occasionally it is more constructive.

Consider the Wiltshire village of Maiden Bradley whose only local shop announced its closure in the light of its lack of profitability. The village response to this, galvanised by a dynamic parish councillor, was to lease the shop from the landlord and run it as a community service. Funding was raised by public subscription (£5000 from shares offered to those on the electoral roll) and from the Countryside Agency’s ‘Vital Villages Scheme’ (£21 500). The shop is run by volunteers and is trying to stock local produce in order to support local businesses and reduce its environmental impact (although they have had difficulty in stocking local milk due to legislation governing milk marketing and supply). If successful, the shop may well be able to contribute to greater environmental and social sustainability, and it has plans to buy a minibus to make local food deliveries in outlying villages, and to transport people without cars to doctor’s surgeries and other essential, often non-local, facilities. To date this is a community initiative that has

been launched without the help of its local authority and may well thrive as long as barriers to its implementation are not introduced. It is not the first community owned shop in the UK, but if it is well supported, it could offer a way forward for other under-provisioned villages. This initiative has been successful so far in large part due to the strength of the local community and a determined champion. In places where these are less pronounced there may be more need for local government to take the lead.

Local government often finds itself in a position in which there are conflicts of interest and different interpretations can be put on the role of local government in these instances. For example, in one London borough, land which has supported local allotments has been sold to developers for a project which is explicitly designed to promote an activity which will increase car use. On the one hand the local authority sees an opportunity to attract more people to an amenity of national importance, thus raising the visibility and income of the area, whilst on the other it is both removing a local social and environmental amenity for residents and increasing local environmental stress through rising traffic levels.

In a more subtle mix, the relationship between local government and community initiatives may require giving the community space to be creative. The most innovative projects are rarely conceived of within local government; it is in the more radical spaces of direct practical action that this takes place. Such spaces can allow creative protest which local government may be sympathetic to, but cannot ally itself too closely with, or may be a testing ground for projects which might have a wider application. One useful role of local government could be to identify how these individual projects might be applied and to mainstream those with wider potential benefits and applications. Chapter 8 illustrates how a London borough took the concept of Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS) from communities with a relatively strong social and economic fabric, and with identifiable environmental concern, and applied this as an anti-poverty strategy in a borough with little social cohesion, pockets of poverty which rarely intersected, and highly variable environmental concern. Whilst local economic trading appeared to work well between neighbours familiar to each other, it could not be sustained as a strategy to provide essential services to strangers (for example, babysitting – a mainstay of traded services in a cohesive community – is just not feasible as a practice to exchange between people who have no previous knowledge of each other, nor does it have any 'guarantee' that may be offered by a service paid for).

Church and Young (2001) comment on the success of projects for sustainable development run by NGOs and community organisations. Many of these projects, such as farmers' markets, recycling schemes, local amenity projects and tree-planting, have their roots in environmental concern and are often linked to schools. Other projects link environmental and social concerns for example, in regeneration areas, as Box 1.2, presenting the Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED), demonstrates. Such

Box 1.2 Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED)

BedZED is a mixed development urban village conceived of by Bio-Regional and built and managed by the Peabody Trust. On a brownfield site in the London borough of Sutton the development provides 82 dwellings (in a mixture of flats, maisonettes and town houses), offices, community accommodation and a sports clubhouse.

According to the designers of BedZED, the combination of super-insulation, a wind driven ventilation system incorporating heat recovery, and passive solar gain stored within each flat by thermally massive floors and walls, reduces the need for both electricity and heat to the point where a 135kW wood fuelled combined heat and power plant (chp) can meet the energy requirements for a community of around 240 residents and 200 workers. The community treats all its black and grey water on site, and collects rainwater to minimise mains water consumption. A photovoltaic installation provides enough solar electricity to power 40 electric cars and the community has the capability to lead a carbon neutral lifestyle – with all energy for buildings and local transport being supplied by renewable energy sources. Other environmentally sensitive practices include community composting and plans for urban gardening on part of the adjoining Metropolitan Open Land, subject to local authority approval.

The design provides a carefully researched balance between the needs of residents, businesses and community activities; the need for sunlight and daylight; an economic construction system and high levels of insulation without losing contact with the outside world. It must also meet the needs of the Peabody Trust which owns the freehold and manages the accommodation.

Using the Bio-Regional principles of local material and labour sourcing stimulating the local economy, and minimising pollution from transportation, the team is now developing a site based prefabrication technique. On-site workshops will accept second hand materials directly from demolition sites, clean up both timber and steel, and use simple jigs to build structural frames. New hardwoods such as oak and chestnut are sourced from local WWF Forest Stewardship Council approved woodland. Local brick, concrete aggregate and precast floor planks can all be sourced within 35 miles of the site, ensuring that all bulky materials have a reduced embodied energy.

The designers (Bill Dunster Associates) note that the true value of any site is determined by the amount of accommodation the local planning area sub-committee will allow to be built on it – empowering local communities to promote zero emissions developments, without relying on large central government grants, or asking the developer to pay for the increased building costs of super efficient urban fabric.

projects have a dual purpose of making both social and environmental improvements and, through community input, developing the capacity of local communities to do so (sometimes in the face of contradictory pressures). It is to this capacity building aspect that we now turn.

1.4 Local capacity building

A number of commentators have argued that building local knowledge and building on local knowledge within civil society is key to the development of social capital and institutional capital. Healey (1998) comments on the importance of local knowledge within different sectors of civil society, and emphasises that there is a need for local government to learn about 'different social worlds' from which 'stakeholder' groups and organisations come. This view is echoed by Taylor (2000), who argues that local communities do bring significant local knowledge to the table, and that this has been undervalued in the past. This clearly links to wider debates on the 'shift' within local government from government to governance and the importance of greater interaction with civil society, particularly the need for local policy makers to build up processes of social learning (or capacity building).

The term 'capacity building' has been applied, both in relation to policy making at the local level in general, and specifically in terms of LA21 and other initiatives for sustainable development. For example, the United Nations Development Capacity 21 programme understands capacity building as:

. . . the sum of the efforts needed to nurture, enhance and utilise the skills of people and institutions to progress towards sustainable development. (UNDP, 1999)

The concept of capacity building has a particularly prominent place in contemporary environmental policy making in that it was identified as the principal 'means of implementation' for most of the programme areas of the 1992 Agenda 21 agreement, and as such it has become an important element in Local Agenda 21 programmes worldwide. Capacity building is usually understood as a process which strengthens the ability of local communities and organisations to build their structures, systems, people and skills in order to undertake and develop initiatives which will contribute to sustainable development.

Indeed, research on the progress and process of LA21 across Europe (Evans and Theobald, 2001) indicates that participation both by citizens and stakeholder groups is clearly being seen as a key aspect of sustainable development, both by local authorities and stakeholder groups themselves. However, there are distinct variations between countries in the level of community involvement, and the nature of that involvement. Across

Europe there is a view that greater participation is needed from the private sector, social NGOs, and community groups.

An issue of particular concern (raised in the European research – Evans and Theobald, 2001) is how to engage individuals and groups in decision-making processes. Two specific approaches emerge as being important: firstly the need for local authorities to establish and invest in long-term projects for sustainable development. This would indicate that they are committed to the process on a long-term basis. It would also provide opportunities for local people to participate in practical projects within the local community. Secondly, it is essential that local authorities both gain and maintain the trust of local people and stakeholder groups, and the involvement of local people in projects could both help to improve trust, and to raise awareness of sustainable development issues.

There are many examples of linking local government and civil society, through community-based projects. There is a synergy from building on these links so that capacity building is achieved through partnership in delivering local environmental sustainability projects and policies. Greater capacity as the sum of the collective work done in various initiatives is greater than the individual parts or partners, and, overall, individual projects and initiatives have a positive impact locally regarding environmental sustainability.

One recent initiative (BedZED) in the UK, described in Box 1.2, exemplifies the opportunities for local environmental sustainability when a local authority supports the development of innovative projects which benefit the local community and contribute to the social, environmental, and economic aspects of sustainable development. (However, it should be noted that local authority support has not been unequivocal and has been the result of substantial negotiation.)

The purpose of BedZED, as Box 1.2 shows, is not only to minimise the development's environmental impact, but also to foster community activity and integration in a relatively poor area of South London. For example, local, non-BedZED residents are encouraged to use the development's facilities. The project demonstrates how environmental and social principles can be synergistically combined, with minimal electricity bills making a significant potential contribution to the budgets of particularly low-income households, for whom these represent a higher proportion of income. The Easterhouse Solar Project in Glasgow likewise emphasises the benefits of this, where a pilot group of 36 flats has been treated to super insulation (added conservatories at ground level, glassed-in balconies), and more efficient central heating and solar roof panels, which have dramatically reduced heating bills allowing residents to use energy effectively, and eliminating the previously notorious damp and mouldy conditions (McDowell, 1999). This project was supported by Glasgow City Council and was part funded by the European Union and, as with BedZED, has served as a demonstration project.

1.5 Structure of the book

This introduction has made reference to a number of projects demanding various levels of investment and with both environmental and social benefits, which illustrate what can be achieved by local communities, not-for-profit organisations and local government working in various combinations. They are small scale and, as yet, not widely replicated, although there are indications that some provide inspiration to other groups and localities (a similar project inspired by BedZED is being developed in the London borough of Merton, although, at the time of writing, a number of financial and logistical hurdles had yet to be overcome).

This book includes reviews of a number of similar initiatives and practices, which combine environmental and social sustainability and which have been developed to a lesser or greater extent nationwide. Local markets (Chapter 6) and recycling (Chapter 7) are familiar practices in the local landscape and constitute more than their ostensible respective purposes of provisioning food and managing waste. Both marketing and recycling enable participants to feel part of the wider community as do the less common, but emerging activities of local economic trading schemes (Chapter 8) and community gardening (Chapter 9). These four case studies are by no means problem free and their limitations are discussed by their respective authors, but the chapters show the potential for local scale responses to the need for localities to become more environmentally and socially sustainable. The case studies are concluded by Chapter 10, on the Canadian experience of local projects in which the author considers sustainable development projects in Toronto.

The case studies are preceded, however, with introductory chapters outlining more general aspects of sustainable development. Chapter 2 discusses the role of regional government in the UK in delivering sustainable development. It particularly focuses on Regional Development Agencies and their obligation to develop a strategy to combat climate change (as part of the UK Government's commitment to EU targets in this area). Since the RDAs must work with local authorities, this provides an important connection to this relatively new sphere of governance. Chapter 3, on the restructuring of the china clay industry in Cornwall, illustrates how a more environmentally sustainable approach to recovering landscape degraded by minerals extraction can be secured at the local-regional level. This is followed by a chapter on the development of Local Agenda 21 across Europe, signalling the importance of this initiative and how its success is contingent on particular partnerships at the local level. Chapter 5 considers the importance of working with local communities in developing sustainable development strategies, particularly through the mechanism of the focus group. Given the difficulties many local authorities in the UK and elsewhere have had in generating public participation (Buckingham-Hatfield, 1999; Evans and Percy, 1999; Selman, 1998), it is of critical importance that they have

decision-making structures in place that are open to and encouraging of public involvement.

The book concludes with a chapter on inequality and disadvantaged communities, which calls for planning, as part of local government, to be reinigorated as an egalitarian mechanism to achieve fairer sustainable development practices and processes. Central to this is the notion that, however imperfect elected local government is, it is the most democratic and accountable form of decision-making that exists at the local level and, as such, is of critical importance in developing projects which have the widest benefit and which address the needs of the poorest, most disadvantaged and (as usually follows) least vocal groups in society. An earlier version of this chapter was given as the Judith Matthews Memorial Lecture at a conference organised by the Planning and Environment Research Group (PERG) of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG)) in 1999, from which the idea of this book emerged. Judith Matthews' work was distinguished by her commitment to making academic work relevant to local community needs, and she put this into practice in her own work in West Devon. After her death in 1998, the PERG honoured her by creating a bursary to support young researchers working on community-related research to attend international conferences. Andy Blower's lecture inaugurated this award and it is an appropriate segue to the rest of this book to emphasise that the academic research reported here is yet another important component of local partnerships working towards sustainable development.

1.6 References

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