an introduction to

needs based design

nat haltrich
ella lawton
tom cross
geoff stack

a supplement to a thesis entitled:

“Co-creating Community With a Needs-Based Approach to Urban Design and Planning”

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Needs Based Design addresses the way we create, build and maintain the physical and social infrastructure of the communities that we live in and is a platform to help society move towards, and beyond, sustainability.

Needs Based Design provides a new way to think about and pursue the full potential of a community development project by addressing complex and interrelated problems early in the process with everyone present. **Needs Based Design uses an ‘outside-in,’ systems thinking approach** centred on the needs of individuals within society within the biosphere to create healthy and vibrant communities.

The **Needs Based Design framework** provides a structure for decision-making within the context of an urban design project. The framework allows urban design and planning to be approached from an overiewed perspective of success, and uses ‘backcasting’, ‘meaningful participation’ and ‘strategic guidelines’ to guide development at the project level based on a scientifically-derived definition of sustainability.

The framework is applied using the **‘IDEA method.’** IDEA asks project teams to state the **I**ntents of their project, **D**iscover the needs of the social and natural communities that it will participate in, **E**nvision a successful future and **A**ct to achieve that vision through an integrated design process.
thank you.

If you’re reading this, you have an interest in helping society move towards sustainability. We thank you for all your efforts (past, present and future), as we work together to try to figure out how to make our communities healthier, more vibrant and liveable.

We also have a couple of special thank-yous:

First, a thanks to our advisors. Richard Blume, as our primary advisor, helped us to clarify which ‘process of the process of the process’ we were actually talking about and provided us with invaluable feedback. Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt has challenged and inspired us all year and is responsible for the evolution of many of the concepts that we build from. Bill Reed has continually challenged us to explore the world beyond sustainability. And Grant helped us through our many, many edits.

We would like to thank the MSLS programme staff for their insight and strategic hands-off approach to leadership and learning. They have done a wonderful job at giving us the crucial guidance when needed. We wish you all luck on your own journeys.

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None of us would be here without the unconditional love and support of our close families and friends back home. If absence makes the heart grow fonder, our fondness is full!

And finally, our great appreciation goes to the planet on which we live. We collectively promise to undertake the challenge of leading society towards a positive and participatory and healthy relationship with the biosphere. We will live out each day seeking a deeper understanding of our own relationships with the communities in which we reside in order to take the best advantage of the opportunities that are afforded to us.

“There are no experts here. We are all co-learners.” – Bill Reed, Regenesis
A big thank you goes to our collaborators and interviewees that graciously took time to participate in our learning journey. We thank them for all of the input, insights and inspiration they were able to provide.

**Design Professionals**

Dennis Carmichael  
Vice-President  
EDAW / AECOM  
USA

Deb Guenther  
Principal  
Mithun  
USA

Wil Mayhew  
Sustainability Coordinator  
Emerald Hills Urban Village  
Howell-Mayhew Engineering  
Canada

Nando Micale  
Principal  
Wallace, Roberts & Todd  
USA

Timothy Smith  
Principal / Director of Urban Design and Planning  
SERA Architects  
USA

Sim van der Ryn  
President  
Ecological Design Institute  
USA

---

**Developers**

Todd Galarneau  
Vice President  
The Corky McMillan Companies  
USA

Katja Lietz  
Project Manager  
Hobsonville Land Company  
New Zealand

Marco Sessa  
Vice President  
Stephen Haase  
Vice President  
Sudberry Properties  
USA

John Startt  
President  
JST Builders  
USA

Dennis Wilde  
Principal  
Gerding Edlen Development  
USA

---

**Sustainability Consultants**

Duke Castle  
Co-Founder / Consultant  
Oregon Natural Step Network  
USA

David Cook  
Chief Executive  
The Natural Step International  
Sweden

Sarah James  
Consultant  
Sarah James & Associates  
USA

Maggie Lawton  
Sustainability + Water Management Consultant  
Braidwood Consulting  
The Natural Step  
New Zealand

Stanley Nyoni  
Senior Management Consultant  
The Natural Step International  
Sweden

Mike Purcell  
Senior Sustainability Advisor  
The Natural Step  
Canada

Tim O’Riordan  
Consultant / Professor  
UK Sustainable Development Commission / University of East Anglia  
United Kingdom

Alex Zimmerman  
President  
Applied Green Consulting Ltd.  
Canada

---

**Government**

Mina Hilsenrath  
Division Chief - Environmental & Community Planning  
Howard County Planning and Zoning  
USA

Erland Ullstad  
Växjö City Architect / Växjö University Professor  
Växjö Municipality  
Sweden

---

**Academics**

Geoffrey Gooch  
Professor of Political Science  
Linköping University  
Sweden

Kay Saville-Smith  
Research Director  
Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Analysis (CRESA)  
New Zealand

Jack Sullivan  
Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture  
University of Maryland  
USA

Robert Vale  
Professor of Architecture  
Victoria University  
New Zealand

---

**Advisors**

Richard Blume  
MSLS Programme  
Blekinge Institute of Technology  
Sweden

Dr. Karl-Henrik Robért  
Founder  
The Natural Step International  
Sweden

Bill Reed  
Architect / Consultant  
Integrative Design Collaborative / Regenesis / Natural Logic  
USA
glossary

**ABCD analysis:** A strategic tool used within the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development developed to backcast from basic principles of success using four steps (Holmberg & Robèrt 2000):
- **Awareness:** FSSD + the motivation for pursuing sustainability
- **Baseline:** An assessment listing all current assets and problems
- **Clear & Constructive Visioning:** Solutions + visions
- **Down to Action:** Actions evaluated using the strategic guidelines.

The ABCD analysis is used to inform the IDEA method.

**Backcasting:** A planning procedure where a successful outcome or vision of success is imagined in the future, followed by the question: "what do we need to do today to reach a successful outcome?"

**Barriers:** Challenges or obstacles that prevent people the opportunity to fulfil their basic human needs.

**Basic human needs:** A comprehensive set of fundamental needs that are culturally and historically universal, non-overlapping, non-substitutable, complimentary to one another, and seek continual satisfaction. They are: subsistence, protection, affection, idleness, identity, freedom, creativity, participation and understanding. (Max-Neef 1991)

**Co-create:** The collaborative creation of ideas and concepts between individuals and groups.

**Community:** A group of people who have one or many distinguishing component(s) of their lives in common. The parameter of the community is often defined as all those who live in the same geographic area.

**Firesoul:** An individual who adds significant character to the community, often described as someone who makes things happen and inspires others to do the same (James & Lahti 2004).

**Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD):** A framework for strategic planning in complex systems that applies backcasting from sustainability principles to help guide society towards sustainability (Robèrt et al. 2002; Robèrt 2000).

**Holistic:** The inclusion or involvement of something in its entirety.

**IDEA method:** A strategic implementation tool used to apply Needs Based Design. The IDEA method has been adapted from the concepts of the ABCD analysis and uses the approach outlined by the Needs Based Design framework. It involves an understanding of the project’s intent (Intend), an understanding of the community’s needs and place (Discovery of needs and place), clear and constructive visioning of potential solutions to address the needs of individuals and the project (Envision), and an action phase where all participants begin the integrated design phase(s) (Act).

**Meaningful participation:** The act of taking part or sharing in something that invites transparency and honesty. This interaction forms a trustworthy relationship that positively connects with people on a personal level to fulfil the individual and community basic human need for participation.

**Needs Based Design (NBD):** A strategic approach, framework and tool, adapted from the FSSD, for structuring and implementing urban design and planning processes.

**Project:** One specific effort in the development of the human built environment.

**Residents:** The people who inhabit or occupy a community or building, also considered to be the occupants.

**Shared vision:** The capacity to hold a shared picture of the future sought to be created. It consists of two components:
- Core ideology: The enduring character of an organisation, or a consistent identity based on a set of core values and a core purpose.
- Envisioned future: A 10-to-30 year audacious goal and a vivid description of what that goal would look like.

**Sustainability Principles:** Generic principles used to define sustainability from a science-based, whole systems perspective:
- In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing …
- 1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust,
- 2. concentrations of substances produced by society,
- 3. degradation by physical means
- and, in that society…
- 4. people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs. (Ny et al. 2006; Robèrt 2000)

**System:** The institutions, structural influences and natural cycles beyond the neighbourhood, that define the broader environment of which the neighbourhood and initiative are a part. Examples include society, the natural environment, and the biosphere.
This introduction to Needs Based Design is intended to give you the basics for exploring where its **approach**, **framework** and **method** may be used within your design and planning projects.

These pages will not tell you ‘how’ to go about completing a design or planning project or how to manage it. Schedules, budgets, tools, techniques, indicators and deliverables are inevitably unique to each project and are not spelled out here. Also, Needs Based Design does not contain a single definition of success nor does it have checklists of the tasks to complete or the objects that should be included in a successful project.

Rather, **Needs Based Design focuses on the questions of ‘why’ certain mindsets, structures and processes have greater potential for helping us reach success, and ‘who’ should be involved to make the most of everyone’s time and efforts along the way.** The next 51 pages will help you explore your own solutions for moving towards sustainability.

We will first touch on the current state of green design and planning and the major shortcomings that our research has identified within those approaches. Next, we will dive into Needs Based Design and its approach, framework and method. The **IDEA method** will be elaborated on in detail to give you the introductory know-how to apply Needs Based Design to any development project.

We need to move quickly and strategically towards sustainability, and we look forward to working together with you to do so.

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**Roots in research**

It should be noted that Needs Based Design has not been field-tested just yet. It is a theoretical process developed as a thesis project for the Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS) program in southern Sweden early in 2008. Needs Based Design is based on a framework (The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development / The Natural Step framework) and planning method (ABCD) that have been used with great success by hundreds of organisations to help them take significant and strategic steps towards sustainability. While our research considers Needs Based Design to be theoretically robust and valid, the real test will be putting it into practice.

Because of its roots as academic research, all of the theories and knowledge presented within this guide are not proprietary, but available for free use within the public realm. We consider this information to be ‘open source’ and an effort that is to be informed further by the knowledge, expertise and experience of those who are able to contribute to its development.

We ask however, that our work is properly referenced when it is used, and that you won’t hesitate to contact us with your questions, comments and case studies as they come up. Our contact information can be found on page 54.
green design today

There is a great interest and clear passion for green and sustainable design right now that we hope will only grow and flourish with time. Those working with this intent should be rightly commended for their efforts.

Generally, green design aims to reduce the environmental impacts of building and construction projects by increasing the efficiency of building systems, using rapidly renewable or recycled materials, and providing healthy indoor air quality for living and work spaces. Green design has made much progress in recent years and can be heralded for making strides in the right direction, especially in terms of new technologies and building techniques.

While green design is more progressive than conventional design, green design tools and techniques will not be able to deliver a sustainable society by themselves. These efforts still harbour many of the same flaws as conventional design, as green design approaches community development from a mechanistic ‘inside-out’ view, has a faint understanding of the social implications of design, and often lacks structure and a common language for working together with all those involved (refer to outline on right).

The ‘triple bottom line’ is a common mental model that is used to describe the aims of green design projects: steps taken should be good for people, the planet and profits. Environmental concerns are addressed by studying the impacts the project will have on habitat, water, air and land. Social consideration is required to gather ‘input’ from ‘key stakeholders’ through consultation, although usually only after major design decisions have been made. Projects are largely constrained by economic factors that form the basis for decision-making.

Green design strengths + weaknesses

Here is a quick overview of some of the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches:

Strengths of Green Design:
Green design and planning:
• Is based on a general desire to act responsibly in making design decisions and to have less impact on the environment and local infrastructure;
• Strives to use a process that is more holistic, integrative, and inclusive than the process for conventional design;
• Abides by societal laws and considers the laws of nature and natural energy flows;
• Produces buildings that raise the standards for resource efficiency and reduce energy consumption, and
• Utilises project structures and processes that are familiar to all in the fields of design and development.

Weaknesses of Green Design:
In the course of our research, we heard overwhelming agreement that there is a fundamental need to change the way things are done. Within current approaches to green design:
• Communication gaps between parties working on the same projects are not uncommon;
• Shared visions are rare;
• Green design techniques by themselves are recognised to be insufficient to reach sustainability;
• Community education and expectations are ill addressed;
• Market acceptance for green designs and innovation is still under question;
• The general impression of development and construction is a negative one - human activity is seen as an ‘impact’
• Many of the urban spaces we currently have are often dysfunctional, unattractive or both, and,
• Promises made to communities with regard to the benefits of development often remain partially or fully undelivered.
Conventional and green design usually begins with an inventory of all of the things existing on a site – buildings, circulation, utilities, flora and fauna, water resources and people existing there today. The architectural program, the forms and the technical solutions are derived to meet the developer’s requirements. Broad solutions to meet these challenges are generated by a few key designers from the very first moment the site plan arrives, and specialists who are brought on as-needed to study the project components and the impacts they will have.

In this way, current approaches can be characterised as ‘inside-out’, as the project itself is the first and most important focus of the design process. Its impacts on the surrounding systems are considered, studied and documented largely after the design has been completed.

The parallels with conventional design are also apparent in the structure of the project process, as green design projects are often completed in the same way as all other projects. In general, projects unfold in five phases: Pre-project, Problem Definition, Concept Design, Schematic Design, and Design Development. The client usually completes the first two phases and hires a consultant team to complete the concept, schematic and design development phases (refer to diagram below).

These shortcomings are significant, but realising and addressing them are just half the battle. We need to figure out the best ways to harness all of the great energy in green design to work together to advance the conversation about how we can achieve sustainability together.

Three big shortfalls

In general, there are three main shortfalls to the current way things are done. These need to be addressed if our hopes to build sustainable communities are to be truly realised. Current approaches:

- Lack a systems perspective. They often address sustainability from a limited and mechanistic perspective of the objects on the site only, neglecting a comprehensive whole systems perspective.

- Lack the sufficient means to consider the social aspects of sustainability. Although social ‘well-being’ and the notion of ‘creating community’ are commonly referred to by green designers and developers, limited insight into how to fulfil these considerations often over-rides the ability to address them.

- Lack structure and a shared language for working together. Green design uses checklists and standards that quantify pieces of the whole that can constrain creative solutions. This structure for planning and designing a project is not founded on strategic planning and decision-making. Confusion between the use of strategies and tools is also common, as tools like LEED® green building standards and other rating systems are used to define the strategy for the process. In addition, without workable definitions for sustainability and a shared vision (definition of success), the focus and direction of a project are rarely shared between the project participants.
needs based design

What will we create to contribute to the flourishing of life?

Needs Based Design is a systems-thinking approach that provides design, development, and planning teams with a common language, strategy and method for designing, constructing and maintaining the physical and social infrastructure of communities. Needs Based Design plants and nurtures the seed of individual and community change for the growth of sustainable society.

Continuing with business as usual and the same thinking that has contributed to the unsustainable mess that we are in is simply dangerous. Furthermore, sustainability is more than just a design problem and we must explore new approaches that move beyond the creation of better ‘things’ and focus on the needs of individuals within healthy and flourishing natural and social communities.

Needs Based Design consists of a general approach, a planning framework, and a method to guide its implementation. Each of these components support one another in the pursuit of a successful project.

**NBD approach**

- **systems thinking**
  - Basic human needs
  - Freedom
  - Creativity
  - Participation
  - Understanding
  - Subsistence
  - Protection
  - Affection
  - Idleness
  - Identity

**NBD framework**

- **Regional sustainability efforts**
  - Vision
  - Intention
  - Discover needs and place
  - Plan
  - Act - Integrated Design Phase(s)

**IDEA method**

- **Regional sustainability efforts**
  - Intention
  - Discover needs and place
  - Plan
  - Act - Integrated Design Phase(s)

“When you frame the issues as sustainable development, or healthy communities, or quality of life, you dissolve a number of those controversies because people can see a bigger vision, how everyone can win... [The] key is to create places that people will invest in over time.”

- Deb Guenther, Mithun

“We have never had anyone say to us that they want a project that is less sustainable”

- Marco Sessa, Sudberry Properties

**Filling the gaps**

Needs Based Design tackles the challenge of designing for sustainability. It:

- Uses **systems** thinking. The larger context that the project participates in is always considered first and the project is designed to support and contribute to ecological and socio-cultural systems.

- Provides a way to deal with complex **social** issues by focusing on the needs of individuals both in the project team and throughout the community at large. The needs of individuals are considered by addressing human needs at a fundamental level.

- Uses a **structured** and robust framework and shared language to spur and advance dialogue about how to move forward together towards co-created and well-defined goals.
who can use nbd?

The Needs Based Design approach can be applied to any design or planning project, from a single office building to a new neighborhood development, to an entire regional plan. It provides a broad platform for change.

- **For government**, Needs Based Design provides a way to realise regional sustainability goals at a practical project level and encourage the maximum potential from development efforts within your community.
- **For developers**, Needs Based Design provides a way to work with the many interests within communities to realise the greatest returns on a planned project.
- **For designers and planners**, Needs Based Design provides you with a common language, and supports your greatest creative abilities to encourage you to design and plan beyond current norms.
- **For communities and citizens**, Needs Based Design provides a way to express your needs and positively influence the decisions that will effect how you are able to continually explore and expand wellbeing within society now and in the future.

Needs Based Design addresses both the physical and social aspects of both new and existing communities. It creates a way to move forward together by providing a common language, an understanding of successful outcomes, and the space for dialogue and creativity to help to define and pursue our goals for sustainability within a community.

“People do as good as they can, and as good as they can afford”
- Erland Ullstad, Växjö City Architect

“If you’re going to embark on this, you have to be prepared to change the entire culture of your organisation, because that’s what it’s going to involve... It’s taken us 10 or 11 years to get to where we are to have integrated these concepts within our company, so it didn’t happen overnight. And it doesn’t happen without leadership at the top of the organisation”
- Dennis Wilde, Gerding Edlen Development

Will it pencil out?

We think there is a great business case for using Needs Based Design, but because it has yet to be put into practice, we can’t make a definitive statement just yet. There is, however, strong anecdotal evidence that suggests that the frameworks, tools and techniques in this introduction can help mitigate risk and deliver many benefits for communities and clients, including solid financial returns.

Money drives all development, and for good reason - it provides something of value to recognise work done. Needs Based Design considers money in this context – as a social tool to catalyse development and not as a goal in itself. We all require a relatively continual flow of money to make things happen, and therefore, we should not take steps that do not provide a reasonable return on investment.

Furthermore, there are many case studies showing that green and regenerative projects have been done at costs comparable to conventional projects. Excellent and smart designs can be delivered on budget, no matter how ‘green’ they are - to insist otherwise cripples creativity from the start. The show will, and must, go on – the bigger issue is deciding which acts make up the performance.

“I don’t see what you’re proposing as uniquely challenging - a clever developer should see it as a solution to their problems – not another fiery hoop to jump... What I’ve seen with the Noisette and Dockside Green developments is that they don’t have to spend hardly any money on marketing. If you do this right and you get the community engagement, you get the sustainability principles embedded and you do something new and exciting...your marketing budget can be very small because you have the media beating a path to your door”
- Alex Zimmerman, Applied Green Consulting

“Huge opportunities exist for business to do more good, and be rewarded for it.”
- Deb Guenther, Mithun
The positives of participation

Full and meaningful participation allows for the following to occur:
- It supports a transparent decision-making process that can reduce potential adversity to the project.
- It promotes unity and allows vast amounts of knowledge within the community to be accessed.
- It fosters the partnerships and stronger bonds between people and leaders within their community.
- Participation encourages team learning that has been found to encourage communities in a successful transition towards sustainability.
- It allows the ‘big picture’ of sustainability can be presented and can to inspire widespread behaviour change by community members towards more sustainable actions.

Yes, AND...

It is equally important to note that any project pursuing broad participation in the process will require skilled facilitation, structured dialogue and active listening. Past experience recognises that general participation can ‘open the floodgates’ to discussions of personal agendas rather than conversation about the common good. NIMBY and NOTE advocacy (‘Not In My Backyard’ and ‘Note Over There Either’) must be overcome by centering the conversation similarities and universal needs rather than personal differences.

“Openness and transparency lead to benefits for all parties, but that’s scary ground to cross.”
- Dennis Wilde, Gerding Edlen Development

“Some of our best ideas have come from the people who come to public meetings because they open our eyes to the unique qualities of a place, history or something that we would not have gotten ourselves.”
- Dennis Carmichael, EDAW

Community participation can be a large use of time, but “needs to happen” and “becomes a very smart investment if done properly and can only serve to the betterment of the project and to the success of the developer as well.”
- Jack Sullivan, University of Maryland

A lot of people are impatient with process – period

“It’s a truism that people will support what they help create, and the converse is also true. People will often oppose that which is seen to be imposed upon them.”
- Alex Zimmerman, Applied Green Consulting

Within Needs Based Design, all those who would like to be involved in the project are invited and encouraged to contribute. This may seem incredibly daunting at first, and for good reason - there is often a lot of opposition to development, and change in general. People don’t mind changing, but they usually resist any change that they perceive as forced upon them. Furthermore, whatever the experience, getting the most out of a public participation process is a difficult and delicate task, but one that can be quite beneficial when directed by an experienced facilitation.

First, involving people to co-create a vision of what their community will become is essential in making it a reality. The project will benefit from individual’s unique understanding of the way their community operates and meaningful participation affords community members the opportunity to define how they will meet their own needs in years to come. As Alex Zimmerman notes below, this can also foster positive support for efforts, as people have an avenue to contribute their own ideals and ideas to the project.

To get the most out of these efforts, participation processes should address both ‘involvement’ and ‘inclusiveness’. Involvement highlights the active role that all participants can take and indicates the importance of making a genuine, open and broad invitation to encourage their participation. Inclusiveness then takes into account the needs of others, regardless of their presence or absence in the process (i.e. unknown future residents of a community and future generations).

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the role of government

The mandate and responsibility for setting and maintaining community plans and building standards is often held at the regional municipality level. Government officials have great sway over the approaches and decision-making employed by project teams in terms of their strategy, scheduling and steps to be implemented. Needs Based Design challenges government to reassess the rules, processes and regulations used to guide the development process.

Currently, government codes and regulations usually only focus on the minimum standards that projects must achieve and often set strict rules on what measures may or may not be implemented. By doing so, they often discourage innovation and creativity that could help in society’s transition towards sustainability. The project approval process can be a long and cumbersome for both government and developers. Developers who ‘break the rules’ are currently treated in the same way regardless of whether their intent is positive or negative.

Calls for finding a way around these roadblocks are common – in his quote below, John Startt speaks directly of allowing progressive members of the development industry to take on the challenges of sustainable development in more creative ways. Needs Based Design challenges government to reconsider their relationship with the development community and enact policies that support and encourage the maximum potential of projects within their communities.

“We’re trying to get away from saying: ‘let’s have a sustainable city’ and wondering what that is. We’re saying: ‘what would the experience of that be?’ ‘What would my everyday relationships be with my family, with my neighbors?’ And then start working back and saying ‘and what do you need to get that?’ ”
- Kay Saville-Smith, Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Analysis (CRESA)

A connection to the community

A project’s connection to regional sustainability efforts is necessary and natural. By aligning approaches and visions between projects and regional efforts, the chances of overall success increase significantly. Efforts at the regional level can guide sound decision-making while an inclusive project-level process can help spur sustainability at the regional level. As more projects are completed with Needs Based Design, its shared language and approach can become more common and widely understood, making it easier to work together on other sustainability efforts at both the project and regional scale.

“We’re trying to get away from saying: ‘let’s have a sustainable city’ and wondering what that is. We’re saying: ‘what would the experience of that be?’ ‘What would my everyday relationships be with my family, with my neighbors?’ And then start working back and saying ‘and what do you need to get that?’ ”
- Kay Saville-Smith, Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Analysis (CRESA)

“Try to get people to understand that citizenship means moving beyond just paying your dues. It is also about being involved in politics, as a way of living participating, having a say...”
- Tim Smith, SERA Architects

“It is important that everybody sees the goals and understands if the plan is matching up to those or not because then there is a rational basis for making decisions and how to move the process forward.”
- Dennis Carmichael, EDAW
nbd approach

Needs Based Design understands there to be two components of a team’s approach that are indispensable to arrive at success: working from the ‘outside-in’ and maintaining a people-centred perspective based on an understanding of basic human needs.

Needs Based Design is based in systems thinking which challenges us to view things with respect to how they fit within the structures and constraints of the larger whole. Needs Based Design asks design teams to first gain an understanding of the needs of these larger systems and then, AND ONLY THEN pursue design features that allow individuals to fully and actively participate in those larger communities. In this way, the Needs Based Design approach can be characterised as one that is ‘outside-in’ (refer to the diagram at right). It recognises that all projects exist within society and the biosphere (which ultimately allow for the project’s existence) and can participate in those systems in either a positive or negative manner.

Secondly, Needs Based Design is about people. As explained by Manfred Max-Neef, a Chilean economist and creator of the theory of Basic Human Needs, “development is about people, rather than objects”. Understanding the basics of what individuals need to foster sustainable behaviours sets a foundation upon which all other decisions can be made. As part of the approach to Needs Based Design, the core design team is asked to focus on and understand the concept of basic human needs.

With all of this said, the NBD approach is the least well-defined part of Needs Based Design and the area that can be best modified by each project team to meet and enhance their larger goals. Understanding systems thinking and taking a people-centred perspective should only be the minimums. Beyond them, Needs Based Design is completely dependant on the intents and aims of the individuals using it. Teams who would like to pursue restorative or regenerative projects (beyond just sustainable) are certainly encouraged to do so and can use Needs Based Design as a broad platform to work from.

We’ll discuss these two important components (systems thinking and human needs) a little more before we dive into the details of the Needs Based Design framework and IDEA method.

“Engage everyone, every issue, early in the project.”
- Bill Reed, Regenesis

“The best development process will be that which allows the greatest improvement in people’s quality of life.”
- Manfred Max-Neef, economist
Green

**systems thinking**

System thinking is a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past sixty years to make full patterns and structures of a system clearer so we can see how to change them effectively. It challenges us to view things in relation to the larger whole, rather than seeing static parts or snapshots of a situation. We are generally becoming more and more overwhelmed by the complexities within society and how to deal with it on a daily basis - systems thinking helps us to see and understand the whole of the communities that we participate in.

Systems thinking acknowledges that reality never unfolds in straight lines - rather, actions we take within systems are constantly reinforcing or balancing each other. The relationships between people and things within a system can be expressed as feedback loops - reinforcing loops promote consistent and accelerating growth, while balancing loops seek stability through actions that counteract one another. The most difficult part is simply identifying which forces are at work and recognizing delays in the system when actions taken have repercussions far down the road.

From the system perspective, the human actor is part of the feedback process, not standing apart from it. This represents an important shift in awareness. Understanding that everything and everyone are interrelated and interdependent, and exist within larger systems, provides a basic starting point for understanding Needs Based Design and the challenge of sustainability. Within a systems view, sustainability can be seen as a state that is constantly pursued, but never complete - a series of actions that lead to success, rather than a fixed outcome or object (refer to the facing page).

Incorporating systems thinking into the design process provides an understanding of how to foster health of the overall system by focusing on the specific needs and poverties of a particular community (rather than abstract or arbitrary checklists or standards) and then addressing those needs at the project level. Systems thinking can help teams to effectively realise and deliver the greatest potential of project together.

**A ‘sustainable’ building?**

No one object or thing, including a built project, should be labeled ‘sustainable’. Actions taken to help achieve and maintain a system can be sustainable, but things by themselves cannot. This is a subtle, but important change in mindset to achieve the jump from focusing on things to focusing on systems.

Even trees in all of their beauty and brilliance should not be labeled as ‘sustainable.’ While alive, they cannot survive without a constant supply of sunlight, air, water, and nutrients. They are fully dependent on the healthy functioning of the overall forest system. Conversely, the survival of the forest ecosystem depends on the positive participation of individual trees in a way that does not degrade the forest as a whole. Furthermore, forests are dependent on global climate and weather patterns – alone, even forests are not ‘sustainable.’

Ironically, although forests themselves cannot be termed ‘sustainable’, their continued harvesting can be. If done in a way that does not contribute to the degradation of the whole system, ‘sustainable forestry’ within the larger system is possible.

In the same way, a social community of people can be sustainable if their actions do not systematically degrade the systems around them. But a physical project, like a neighbourhood development project, cannot be sustainable, as the buildings themselves, like trees, are just things. It is the actions the inhabitants take to build, maintain and live in those houses that define the community’s ability to be ‘sustainable’ in the long term.

“By looking at just the project, and not the larger whole, you are inherently promoting non-sustainability.”

– Tim O’Riordan, UK Sustainable Development Commission

“That’s why this work requires continual iteration - because all your lives you’ve been trained in a different way of thinking.”

- Bill Reed, Regenesis
needs in design

The term “needs” in this work has a dual purpose. It addresses both the basic human needs of individuals within the community (including the project team) and the needs of a sustainable global society, both now and in the future as defined below by the Brundtland Commission. In their broadest sense, development and human needs are components of the same equation. “The best development process will be that which allows the greatest improvement in people’s quality of life” (Max-Neef).

Basic human needs are universal. They are the same for all people for all time. But their satisfiers – the ways to fulfil them – are not. They differ and change between both culture and circumstance, and are most influenced by societal norms and forces. Needs Based Design uses the same non-hierarchical (except for the primary need of subsistence) set of needs that Manfred Max-Neef defines as fundamental:

**BASIC HUMAN NEEDS**

- Subsistence
- Protection
- Freedom
- Affection
- Creativity
- Idleness
- Participation
- Identity
- Understanding

The challenge is two-fold - first, to come up with elements that best support people’s continual efforts to meet their own needs, and secondly, to remove both physical and societal barriers that inhibit these same needs from being met.

We also intend Needs Based Design to support the design of satisfiers that can help fulfil numerous needs for the most people. For example, a clock tower could help satisfy the need for identity within a community, but an annual art fair might use that same money in a way that also helps satisfy the needs of participation, creativity, understanding, freedom, idleness as well as the need for identity.

*Sustainable development “…meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*  
– UN Brundtland Commission
The Needs Based Design framework builds on the strengths of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (refer to page 29) to apply the NBD approach to the urban design and planning process within a five level framework as follows:

**System (Level 1):** Needs Based Design considers a project to exist within society within the biosphere – both the biosphere and social systems set the boundaries within which the project can function. All systems are important and deeply interconnected and must be considered with a patterns-based understanding of needs and place.

**Success (Level 2):** Success in the design and development of a Needs Based Design project will afford individuals the opportunity to consistently and abundantly realise the fulfilment of their needs within a sustainable community. A project built on a co-created vision for success has a firm platform from which project teams and the larger community can create a shared understanding of both the ‘what’ and ‘who’ of the place that the project will participate in.

Needs Based Design uses the FSSD Sustainability Principles (SPs) to help define success (refer to Success level in the framework to the right). They outline the minimum conditions that society must fulfil to curb our current path of unsustainability and are phrased in the negative (i.e. “natural systems are NOT subject to...”). Within these constraints, any and all other actions are encouraged, and any team going beyond these minimums are welcome do so (and will probably have an even easier time to implement the project as they work with, rather than against, natural and social systems).

All decisions are made in a way that help move the project closer to complying with the Sustainability Principles. This may seem arduous at first as they are non-prescriptive and can be challenging to apply, but their fundamental basis provides tremendous worth in helping to define what successful efforts must consider. ‘What do the SPs mean?’ in the ‘Extras’ section of this Introduction can help to guide you through their application.
Strategic Guidelines (Level 3): Strategic guidelines are the essential concepts that project participants must use to achieve a successful outcome. Needs Based Design uses ‘backcasting’, ‘meaningful participation’ and ‘prioritising guidelines’ to strategically move projects forward.

Backcasting is a planning procedure where a successful outcome or vision of success is imagined in the future followed by the question: “what do we need to do today to reach a successful outcome?” It allows participants to create their community without constraining themselves by the problems of today (i.e. forecasting). Potential answers and actions (no matter how creative) are then brainstormed and prioritised so that they can be implemented in a strategic manner based on the prioritising guidelines described below.

Meaningful participation is recognised not only as a basic human need, but also as a strategic guideline because of its importance in the process of design. Past experience recognises that participation can open the conversation to personal agendas and values, therefore slowing the process and potentially lowering the level of discourse. But increased participation in the creation of the community vision and planning phase has huge potential to optimise chances for success.

Prioritising guidelines allow the project to be tackled from a strategic perspective. Project teams must ask themselves the questions below when considering specific actions:

- Does this measure proceed in the right direction with respect to the vision, and therefore all of the Sustainability Principles?
- Does this measure provide a stepping-stone (i.e. ‘flexible platform’) for future improvements towards sustainability?
- Is this measure likely to produce a sufficient return on investment to further catalyse the process, including ecological, social and economic returns?

Interrelated frameworks

The Needs Based Design framework was adapted from the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD - commonly known as the Natural Step framework), which is based on the Five Level Framework for Planning in Complex Systems. Refer to pages 46 and 47 for a one-page summary of the FSSD.

The development of the FSSD was initiated by Swedish cancer specialist Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt in the late 1980’s and was advanced using a consensus process with scores of collaborators in science and academia. The FSSD is used today by The Natural Step (an international NGO) and others to help advance society towards sustainability.

The FSSD is designed to aid teams in choosing appropriate tools (level 5) to take deliberate actions (level 4) by applying strategic guidelines (level 3) to help advance towards success (level 2) within interconnected and complex systems (level 1). It encourages dialogue and incremental change and is an effective way of planning for sustainability within complex systems. The framework provides a widely applicable “backcasting from Sustainability Principles” approach for use at multiple scales and contexts (global, national, business, community and individual).

Important note: We reversed the order of the FSSD Sustainability Principles for use within Needs Based Design. Although compliance with all four principles are equally important and necessary, ecological issues are usually given more attention than social ones when considering sustainability. We wanted to emphasise the importance of the needs of individuals within society and consider this aspect of sustainability to be one of the greatest leverage points for change within society and within the urban design and planning process.
Actions (Level 4): The Actions level describes the strategic steps prioritised through backcasting, taken to complete the project. This level is completely defined by the project team as the framework does not dictate any specific actions. The project must get done. Actions are strategically selected by backcasting from a vision of a successful project based on the Sustainability Principles and then prioritised according to the prioritising guidelines. What is important to remember is that each and every action does not have to comply completely with the Sustainability Principles, but together must show logical progression towards achieving the goals of success.

Tools (Level 5): The main tool to implement Needs Based Design is the IDEA method (detailed in the next section). All other tools are carefully selected to provide capacity, structural and systematic support and integrity to the project. They may include but are not limited to the following: LEED®, BREEM® and financial capital.

A comparison...

The table to the right summarises and highlights the gaps between current approaches to green design and the Needs Based Design approach analysed using the five levels of the Framework for Planning in Complex Systems.
The Needs Based Design approach is implemented using the IDEA method and consists of the following phases: Intend, Discover, Envision and Act. As diagramed below, Documentation, Construction, Occupancy and Community engagement all fall outside of the design process, and therefore, outside of IDEA.

**Intend.** The ‘Intend’ phase begins with a commitment from the participants that the project will be designed and implemented in a way that will allow for its creators and future occupants to actively, artfully and positively participate in the social and natural systems of the community. This phase asks the team to answer: **What do we intend to create?**

**Discover needs and place.** IDEA continues with the ‘Discover’ phase. A commitment from the team members to fully understand their own needs as individuals, the needs of the community’s social networks and the requirements of the surrounding ecological systems are acquired. This phase asks the team to answer: **What allows life to flourish within us and within this community?**

**Envision.** A shared vision and story of what the project intent is aiming to achieve is the ‘Envision’ step of the IDEA method. The goal of this step is to solidify what the project participants see as ‘success’ with reference to the project. This phase asks the team to answer: **What will we create to contribute to the flourishing of life in this place?**

**Act.** It is only now in the ‘Act’ phase that focus turns directly to the project itself. The goal is to build from the project’s intent and understanding of needs and place to fulfil the participants’ vision to its greatest potential. This phase asks project participants to answer: **How can we fulfil the project’s vision to allow people the opportunity to meet their needs both now and in the future?**

### Milestones in the urban design and planning process

- **Pre-Project**
  - Problem definition
  - Concept Design
  - Schematic Design
  - Design Development

- **Intend**
  - Intend
  - Discover needs and place
  - Envision
  - Act - Integrated Design Phase(s)

- **Future steps**
  - Construction Documentation
  - Construction
  - Occupancy
  - Continued engagement of individuals within community

- **Regional sustainability efforts**

### Project Participants

- **Leadership Team**
- **Core Team**
- **Design teams**
- **Contractors + builders**
- **Public (inc. business)**
- **Government**

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**Phase questions**

- What do we intend to create?
- What allows life to flourish within us and within this community?
- What will we create to contribute to the flourishing of life in this place?
- How can we fulfil the project’s vision to allow people the opportunity to meet their needs both now and in the future?
- What can we do to continually meet our needs and positively participate in the flourishing of this place?
IDEA Guidance notes

The questions, inputs, outputs, tools and resources listed below are just the beginning and are meant as a starting point rather than an exhaustive list. We look forward to learning from you those things that you found to be helpful or hindering in your own practices. Now, let’s get to it!

The guidance notes for each IDEA phase consist of the following:

Phase question
This offers a point of reference for each phase. The more thoroughly the question is answered, the better equipped the participants are to move onto subsequent phases.

Guide notes + questions:
These assist in the application of IDEA, helping participants explore the phase question.

Inputs:
These are the necessary resources to successfully address the phase question (e.g. participants, information). Time and economic capital are of course always required.

Outputs:
Expected outcomes from each phase should reflect the best answer possible to the phase question.

Tools + resources:
These consist of other inputs that may contribute to the completion of the phase. Their use and effectiveness will vary depending on the project, the team and the strengths of the facilitators. Tools and resources are not specific to just one phase and should be considered for use throughout as appropriate.

Guide notes + questions for all phases:
• Each person who joins the project team is made aware of the NBD approach and framework, the IDEA method and the motivation(s) for pursuing sustainability.

• Each phase builds on the prior phase and subsequent work is checked against the outcomes of earlier phases. Participants are encouraged to answer each question as thoroughly as possible.
• The intents, steps and goals for each phase should be discussed, detailed and documented prior to beginning work.
• There is no particular selection process to decide who should be involved in the project.
• The use of consensus agreements in all phases is encouraged. Consensus is NOT the same as unanimity, but a general agreement among the members of a given group or community on the way to move forward together. Each individual exercises discretion in decision-making and follow-up action.
• Within NBD, economic capital (money) is considered to be a tool for supporting the project rather than an end to be achieved.
• The time to complete each phase will fully depend on the size and scope of the project and the needs of the community.

• Have all individuals involved in the project had the opportunity to learn, discuss and understand the concepts of basic human needs and NBD? Do they have access to the resources they need to understand it?
• Have the concepts of backcasting from Sustainability Principles, meaningful participation and the use of the three prioritising guidelines been used throughout the process?
• How can we ensure, to our utmost ability, that the project has followed the guideline of ‘meaningful participation’?
  • Has an open, appropriate, and general invitation to participate in the process been made when appropriate?
  • Have the ‘right’ key people been invited to the conversation? These are the people that provide valuable knowledge and insight, also referred to as the Firesouls of the community. They might also include those who have been connected to the project ‘place’ for generations. Have at least ‘two degrees of separation’ have been used to identify these individuals? Have those already engaged in the process been asked if they are aware of any other individuals who might provide yet more insight to the process?
• Have collaborations with government, business and/or NGOs emerged from the project?
• Have the participants had a chance to discuss and explore the future of their community and their role within it?
• Are the actions taken in each step contributing to efforts that allow individuals to positively participate in their communities?
Intend

What do we intend to create?

Guide questions:
- What purpose is your project trying to fulfil? Is this project even necessary? How can the needs that it is aiming to serve best be fulfilled?
- Who will be recruited to create the best team to support in the creation of this project?
- Have detailed governing and process documents been created for this project to structure and support the desired intents and outcomes?

Inputs:
Needs Based Design approach
Explore the intricacies of this and other theories and approaches to discover what will work well for you and the project team in order to pursue your community's vision.

A desire to continuously learn together
NBD encourages a new way to think, work and act. Constant team learning and flexibility from its participants will allow the team to work best together.

A desire to move towards, and beyond, sustainability.
What are the ways we can support a healthy and vibrant society where people can continuously meet their own needs?

Participants
- Leadership team (owner’s, project manager, council...)
- Core team (core design teams, general contractor(s), government leaders and regulators)
- Facilitator(s) and/or consultants familiar with NBD

Understanding of the regional context:
- The region’s vision or master plan
- Building codes and regulations
- Key influential actors in government – those that can help to build momentum in support of the project

Outputs:

Statement of intent
This is a mission statement for the project based on the needs it is proposing to fulfil. It should be rigorous enough to withstand the test of time. Note that this is NOT a project program or list of design elements, but a statement of what the project team intends to create together.

Documentation of the intend phase
- Governing and process documents – these address how the remainder of IDEA will unfold.
- Communication documents – the document should suggest how participants will communicate with one another to encourage the flourishing of all possibilities throughout IDEA.

Tools and Resources:

‘Big picture’ sustainability inspiration + systems thinking theory:
- The Natural Step (www.naturalstep.org)
- Ishmael (Daniel Quinn 1992)
- The Fifth Discipline (Peter Senge 1990)
- Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought (John Webster 2004)
- The Nature of Order (Christopher Alexander 2002)
- Natural Capitalism (Paul Hawken, Amory & Hunter Lovins 1999)
- Biomimicry (Janine Benyus 1997)
- Permaculture (Bill Mollison 1988)
- Human Scale Development (Manfred Max-Neef 1991)

Progressive design and planning theory:
- Regenerative development (www.regenesis.com)
- Cradle to Cradle (Michael Braungart & William McDonough 2002)
- The Natural Step for Communities (Sarah James & Torbjörn Lahti 2004)
- SuN Living (Wil Mayhew & Elisa Campbell 2008)
- Ecological Design (Sim van der Ryn & Stuart Cowan 1995)
- The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention (David Orr 2002)
- Design with Nature (Ian McHarg 1971)

Dialogue and team learning:
- Team roles and Team learning workshops
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
- The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Chapters 52 to 67 – Team Learning ( pages 351 to 441) (Peter Senge 1994)
- Field Guide to Consulting and Organizational Development – A collaborative and systems approach (Carter McNamara 1997)
Discover needs + place
What allows life to flourish within us and within this community?

Guide notes + questions:
Very little attention is paid to the actual project itself at this stage. Focus is given to the place in which the project will participate, and the needs of the participants and the wider community. Current satisfiers to those needs can also be discussed.

- Has an open invitation for participation been made to the community?
- Have key community members been approached with an invitation to participate, particularly those who may not come forward on their own accord?
- How diverse are the backgrounds of the individuals helping to inform an understanding of needs and place? Which groups are currently under-represented in the community? How can they become more involved?
- Which community groups and individuals could help to collect information about the place? (E.g. residents from neighbouring communities, dog walkers club etc.)
- What are the unique qualities of this place that resonate with people historically, now and potentially in the future?
- Have all historical, environmental, cultural, social, economic and governance contexts been considered?
- How broad and multi-faceted is the information complied to inform the project, process, site inventory and survey?
- How is all of this information best presented to the community?
- What community activities can be initiated to highlight ‘the place’ and gather momentum behind the project?

Inputs:
All information gained from the Intend phase Participants
All who would like to be involved in the project. Community leaders and firesouls are actively sought out. Broad community engagement is invited, including participation from NGOs, businesses and government.

Personal reflection and mastery, and time to explore self.
By continually clarifying and deepening personal visions, focusing energies, developing patience and seeing reality objectively, all participants can develop the personal mastery that will enrich the process and the foundation of their community.

Data
Lots and lots of information about the community at large to gain a pattern understanding of how life thrives there. Data includes as much information as possible collected from numerous sources (e.g. environmental groups, regional parks, museums etc.), and covers all relevant contexts (ecological, cultural and historical, social, economical, community governance, other).

Outputs:
A story of place and meaning
A thorough understanding of needs and place based on all input from all participants – The ‘what’ and ‘who’ or essence of the place is understood and communicated to all interested.

Sense of community and trust
This should be fostered throughout IDEA encouraging engagement and success.

Documentation of the Discover phase

Tools and Resources:
Understanding place:
- A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction (Christopher Alexander 1977)
- Patterning as Process (Tim Murphy and Vicki Marvick 1998)
- The Experience of Place (Tony Hiss 1990)

Dialogue and team learning tools:
- Participation Works: 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century (The New Economics Foundation with members of the UK Community Participation Network 1998)

Strategies:
- Kitchen table conversations and one-to-one interviews
- Story telling
- A methodology to understand Basic Human Needs: Human Scale Development (pages 39 to 42) (Manfred Max-Neef 1991)
- Visit to the project site by phase participants
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities + Threats (SWOT) analysis
Envision

What will we create to contribute to the flourishing of life in this place?

Guide notes + questions:
A vision is co-created based on the intent of the project, a thorough understanding of ‘needs’ and ‘place’, and is framed within the minimal constraints of the Sustainability Principles.

- Has an open invitation for participation been made to the community?
- Have key community members been approached with an invitation to participate, particularly those who may not come forward on their own accord?
- What is the regional vision, if one exists? Has it been taken into consideration and built upon for this specific project?
- How does the project vision relate to the understanding of ‘needs’ and ‘place’?
- Is it broad in both space and time?
- Do participants relate to the vision? Is there consensus?
- What is the project’s vision, core purpose, core values and strategic goals?
- Does the vision reflect the long-term interests of the community?
- How can the shared vision best be communicated?

Inputs:
All information gained from the Intend and Discover phases

Participants
All who would like to be involved in the project. Community leaders and firesouls are actively sought out. Broad community engagement is invited, including participation from NGOs, businesses and government.

Regional vision
The regional vision or master plan is something to consider as necessary. Where master plans don’t yet push into the realm of sustainability, creative project innovation is encouraged. Including government officials in the process might encourage easier adoption of innovative thought into existing policies and regulations.

Outputs:
A vision for the project based on consensus agreement
- Informed and constrained by the Sustainability Principles
- Consists of a core ideology, an envisioned future, and strategic goals

Documentation of the Envision phase

Tools and resources:
Co-creating a vision:
- The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Chapters 44 to 51 – Shared Vision (pages 297 to 347) (Peter Senge 1994)
- Future search (www.futuresearch.net)
- Building Your Company’s Vision (James Collins & Jerry Porras 1996)
- Natural Step ABCD process (www.naturalstep.org)

Strategies:
- Open Space for Dialogue and Enquiry (www.osdemethodology.org.uk)
- World café (Juanita Brown & David Isaacs 2005)
- Visit to the project site by phase participants to re-emphasise the importance of ‘place.’
- Storytelling
- One-to-one conversation
- Personal reflection
Act

How can we fulfil the project’s vision to allow people the opportunity to meet their needs both now and in the future?

Guide notes + questions:

The design of the project itself now becomes the team’s focus. The number of Design Phases (DPs) within the Act phase dictate the number of Community co-creation sessions that will be held.

- Has an open invitation for participation been made to the community?
- Have key community members been approached with an invitation to participate, particularly those who may not come forward on their own accord?
- Have teams from different participant groups exchanged meaningful dialogue about the project?
- How best can we make the expertise of the design teams available to support the co-creation of design solutions?
- Has cross-disciplinary collaboration allowed for dialogue concerning suggestions and major decisions?
- How will the participants’ insights and discussions from the Community co-creation sessions be effectively recorded and distributed to the project teams?
- Are the actions chosen in each DP strategically based on backcasting from the Sustainability Principles and the three prioritisation guidelines of the NBD framework?
- How can we best support the design team in their efforts to fully integrate their work with that of other design teams?
- How can we best foster communication between the design teams and all other participants?
- Have the intent and goals of the each DP been fulfilled in accordance with the project’s vision, before moving onto the next DP?
- Has a final public review, after all DPs have been completed, been held to demonstrate the project’s compliance with the intent, understanding of needs and place and vision?

Inputs:

- All information gained from the Intend, Discover and Envision phases
- An anticipated number of DPs
  The Act phase consists of numerous DPs, the number of which are dependant on the size and complexity of the project. A best-estimate of the number of DPs necessary to satisfy the requirements of the project are decided upon by the core team.
- All information gained from the previous DP(s)
- Participants
  All who would like to be involved in the project. Community leaders and firesouls are actively sought out. Broad community engagement is invited, including participation from NGOs, businesses and government.

Outputs:

- Documentation of the DP
  - A summary document of ideas and efforts, project plans and themes from the DP
  - Documentation of the entire Act phase
- IDEA Documentation
  - A final IDEA document and plan
  - A document with all information from the IDEA method. It will be referred back to for all future steps of the project, and acts as the reference manual upon which all future decisions are made.

Tools + Resources:

- The Integrated Design Process and charrettes:
  - ABCD Co-creation Session – Planning for Sustainability: A Natural Step by Step Guide by The Natural Step (unpublished)
  - Design Charrettes for Sustainable Communities (Patrick Condon 2008)
  - SuN Living. Developing Neighbourhoods with a One Planet Footprint (Wil Mayhew & Elisa Campbell 2008)
- Community outreach and action:
  - Resources on sustainable living: Community Based Social Marketing Manual (Doug McKenzie-Mohr 1999)
moving forward...

There it is – an approach, a framework and a method to help you initiate the process and add to the discussion of how to pursue sustainability together.

**Needs Based Design does not hold answers or solutions - those are for you to find.**

Needs Based Design does provide us with a way to move forward and advance the pursuit of sustainability by:

- Addressing three big gaps that are currently absent in conventional and green design and planning processes: it uses systems thinking, provides a way to deal with complex social issues, and uses a structured and robust framework.
- Encouraging co-learning and shared visioning in the co-creation of sustainable communities.
- Providing a new way to address sustainability in the building and maintenance of our human habitats.

Ultimately the aim of the game is to strategically move society towards sustainability as quickly and effectively as possible. We hope this introduction has helped to give you some new perspectives and ideas for your next project and we look forward to co-creating projects with you to create healthy and vibrant communities for all of us to enjoy well into the future...

**Cheers and good luck!**

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More information...

**The next few pages contain more detailed information on:**

- The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development
- How to apply the FSSD Sustainability Principles within the context of urban design projects
- General information about a possible structure for the ‘Community co-creation sessions’ in the Act phase, based on the ABCD method used with the FSSD
- A little bit about the authors and the Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability programme at Blekinge Tekniska Högskola
- References and resources to help you on your way

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*The work, for me, is staying in a grounded, heart-connected, planet-connected place while we go through whatever we go through... That is the work.*  
- Jillian Hovey, Permaculturist
Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD)
Applying the Five Level Framework for Planning in Complex Systems to achieve and maintain a sustainable society

Society within the Biosphere: ‘Funnel’ Metaphor

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:
1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust,
2. concentrations of substances produced by society,
3. degradation by physical means,

Each individual organization may develop and add its own principles of success based on the minimum constraints of the Sustainability Principles

Backcasting
A planning procedure by which a successful outcome is imagined in the future, followed by the question: “what do we need to do today to reach the successful outcome?”

Concrete steps based on strategic guidelines
Each organization must choose and consistently evaluate its actions in the context of the strategic guidelines its definition of success.

ABCD Planning Methodology:
Awareness of FSSD and the motivation for pursuing sustainability
Baseline: An assessment listing all current assets and problems
Clear & Constructive Visioning: Solutions and visions for tomorrow
Down to Action: Actions evaluated using the strategic guidelines.

Sustainability Principles

and, in that society:
4. people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

Strategic guidelines for prioritizing actions
Actions are prioritized by searching for measures that:
1. proceed in the right direction with respect to all four sustainability principles
2. function as a stepping-stone (i.e. flexible platform) for future improvements
3. are likely to produce a sufficient return on financial, cultural and political investment to further catalyze the process

Other tools, as appropriate*, for example:
Life Cycle Analysis
ISO Standards
Cradle to Cradle

Ecological Footprinting
LEED® Rating Systems
Happiness Index
Fair Trade

*Selection of tools should be informed by the outcome of the ABCD process to ensure they are appropriate to the organization and the specific planning endeavor

References
what do the sps mean?

SP 4: In a sustainable society, people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

How is this principle considered?
- Encompasses the basic human needs of people both now and in the future
- Recognises that in a sustainable society, barriers have been removed to allow people the opportunity to meet their needs

How is this principle applied?
- An understanding of the concept of basic human needs and a willingness to remove barriers to their fulfilment exists
- Developers and consumers select and design satisfiers that provide the opportunity to fulfil multiple needs, potentially reducing the consumption of unneeded materials and goods. Behaviour patterns to reflect more sustainable actions are encouraged
- Have the needs of the designers and participants within the process been recognised and designed for?
- Has the design of the project taken into consideration the needs of the residents, both known and unknown?
- Are the needs (specifically participation, understanding and identity) of the participants being met within the design and planning process?
- Have barriers to the fulfilment of these needs been removed?

Who should this principle be applied with?
- Process participants
- The living community
- The community at large
- Global residents

SP 3: In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing degradation by physical means.

How is this principle considered?
- Encompasses degradation to landscapes via pollution or over-exploitation of resources (forests, grasslands, water etc.)
- Recognises that continued degradation is not possible in a sustainable society

How is this principle applied?
- Is the project needed to fulfil its intended purpose?
- Are there ways to fulfil the needs of the project without development?
- Can density be increased within an existing development, reducing development on virgin lands?
- Is the project participating positively within ‘place’ within the biosphere, recognising its dependence on natural systems, and contributing to that place’s ecological, social, cultural and historical wealth?
- Where do our selected materials come from? Where does our waste go?
- Does resource use by our project contribute to over-harvesting of non-renewable resources?

What functions should this principle be applied to?
- Site selection – increasing density versus continued sprawl, recognising the project’s ability to positively participate within the selected site
- Resource sources – water, wood, rock, other
- Material selection and disposal – possibility of closed loop systems to re-use and minimise landfill disposal, effluents and emissions
SP 2: In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing concentrations of substances produced by society.

How is this principle considered?
- Encompasses all human-made substances (plastics, complex molecules...) that are foreign to nature and those naturally-occurring substances whose flows are altered through man-made intervention (methane from landfills)
- Recognises that their continual release and accumulation into natural systems is not possible in a sustainable society
- Recognises that human-made substances often emit pollutants during their production and use that are foreign to nature, and can persist as a result of their inability to breakdown readily in natural systems.

How is this principle be applied to?
- Have options to re-use and recycle materials been considered?
- Are we using materials efficiently in products and processes where substances can be recaptured and re-used rather than releasing them and allowing them to accumulate in nature?
- Are we supporting the ability to keep substances in closed loop systems, therefore minimising the need for continued production from virgin resources?
- Can alternative materials be used that pollute less or breakdown more readily in nature?
- What options exist to dispose of these materials? How efficiently do the selected materials breakdown when disposed of if not kept in closed loops?

What functions should this principle be applied to?
- Material selection – buildings, project or community infrastructure and all necessary materials (chemicals, glues, paints...)
- Options to procure organic, sustainable products by the developers and eventual residents of the community

SP 1: In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust.

How is the principle considered?
- Encompasses all mined materials and substances (metals, fossil fuels, natural gas...)
- Recognises that their continual accumulation in the biosphere through continual extraction is not possible in a sustainable society
- Recognises that materials used from the earth’s crust must be used in ways that prevents their accumulation in natural systems.

How is this principle applied?
- Have options to re-use and recycle materials been considered?
- Are we using materials efficiently and in products and processes where they can be recaptured and re-used, rather than releasing them into the atmosphere, water and soil?
- Are we contributing to keeping materials in closed loop systems, therefore minimising the need for virgin extraction?
- Are there alternative substances that can be used that are less harmful to the biosphere? Can substances that are naturally more prolific be used, therefore allowing the biosphere to better assimilate them, for example aluminium instead of copper?

What functions should this principle be applied to?
- Material selection – buildings, project or community infrastructure
- Energy selection – renewable versus non-renewable sources of energy used for both the building process and the community once occupied (transportation, heating, electricity...
co-creation session?

The Community Co-creation Session provides a way to include all participants in the strategic planning of their community.

The session is coordinated into four parts. Time is taken as needed to go through the session in the most effective way. A day to go through each step might very well be necessary. Remember, these co-creation sessions take place within the Act phase of IDEA, beginning after the project’s vision has been co-created.

**Awareness: NBD + the motivation for pursuing sustainability**

- To share the ideas and intents behind Needs Based Design in relation to the project with the participants.
- There are three components that need to be communicated and understood within this first step:
  - Sustainability and the motivation for pursuing it.
  - Needs Based Design – the Needs Based Design approach, framework, and IDEA method are described to all participants. Everything from the Intend, Discovery, and Envision phases are shared with the participants. A shared understanding and definition of sustainability, and what ‘success’ means in relation to the project’s vision are established.
  - Community co-creation session – the way the remainder of the session will be carried out is communicated, as are the aims, components and desired outcomes for each step.

**Baseline: An assessment listing all current assets + problems**

- To identify potential strengths and weaknesses within the project’s scope that could help or hinder society’s transition towards sustainability.
- To identify potential opportunities and threats in the greater system that could help or hinder society’s transition towards sustainability.
- To identify potential barriers to the fulfilment of basic human needs.
- Understanding the baseline is the first essential step of backcasting and includes two components:
  - Participants consider and recognise potential operations that might occur within the project and the dependant systems, and scrutinise them against the sustainability principles; and
  - Participants voice barriers that act to inhibit the fulfilment of their basic human needs.

**Clear & Constructive Visioning: Solutions + visions**

- To have participants contribute and share ideas and solutions to all issues brought up in the Baseline step in a brainstorming session.
- The visioning step is the second essential element of backcasting:
  - Participants are encouraged to brainstorm creative solutions to respond to the Baseline step, and asking the question: “what do we need to do today to reach a successful outcome?”
  - All solutions must comply with the project vision. Creativity within the minimal constraints of the sustainability principles is encouraged.

**Down to Action: Actions evaluated using the strategic guidelines**

- To discuss ideas and solutions and prioritise them according to the prioritising guidelines of Needs Based Design.
- To sort ideas and solutions into an action plan that can inform the building of a sustainable community.
- The Down to Action step allows solutions identified during the Clear & Constructive Visioning step to be strategically prioritised. Answering the following questions will provide guidance and help understand how solutions might build upon one another.
  - Does this measure proceed in the right direction with respect to the vision and therefore all Sustainability Principles?
  - Does this measure provide a stepping-stone (i.e. ‘flexible platform’) for future improvements towards sustainability?
  - Is this measure likely to produce a sufficient return on investment to further catalyse the process, including ecological, social and economic returns?
about the authors

Natalie Haltrich BSc

Natalie Haltrich is a certified guide with the Sea Kayak Guides Alliance of British Columbia, a graduate of Advanced Wilderness Leadership from Capilano College in British Columbia, and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Biology and Environmental Studies from McGill University in Montreal. Her inspiration for sustainability stems from a passion of people and places, and a recognition that both can live in harmony within the finite provisions of this planet. She is compelled by a desire to actively and artfully enjoy the better things in life, and welcomes all on her journey.

Canada
nhaltrich@gmail.com

Ella Lawton LLB BSc GCAS

Ella Lawton's upbringing on a small farm in South Auckland, Aotearoa created the foundation for her passion for the environment and appreciation of society’s place within natural systems. Ella has a Bachelor’s of Science in Ecology and a Bachelor’s of Law from Otago University, Dunedin. She has also spent time studying and researching in Canada, Finland, Sweden and Antarctica. Upon return to New Zealand Ella hopes put her theoretical knowledge to practical use, through involvement in regional development projects and sustainability networking and education.

New Zealand
elawton66@gmail.com

Geoffrey Stack BLA LEED®AP

Geoff Stack combines his experience in design, education and ecology to co-create ways to invite, integrate and inspire a move towards sustainability. With a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Maryland, Geoff has worked on plans for public open space, university campus and urban redevelopment projects. He is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional and looks forward to exploring further how to create human infrastructure that functions in partnership with the natural life support systems of the planet.

United States
geoff.stack@gmail.com

about the msls program

Master’s Programme in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS)

The challenge
The results of unsustainable human development are evident worldwide — climate change, species extinction, pollution, poverty, and inequality are deteriorating our capacity to sustain our ways of life. Our society needs more effective ways of using our skills and resources to create positive change. This is the challenge that our graduates are prepared to meet.

Description of the programme
The programme is founded on the basic premise that a ‘whole-system’, transdisciplinary approach is needed to deal with the sustainability challenge of meeting our society’s needs today and into the future. The programme is delivered in a non-traditional educational setting with experiential and holistic learning methods. Two integrated streams are the focus: 1) a framework for strategic sustainable development; and 2) organisational learning and leadership required for sustainability decision-making.

A participant will gain
• The scientific foundation and the practical skills for strategic planning towards a sustainable society;
• Experiential learning from one of the leading nations in sustainability practice Sweden;
• Interaction with peers from diverse nationalities and professional backgrounds;
• Graduation into an active alumni network; and
• Career paths as sustainability practitioners in business, academia, government, and community organisations.

Programme specifics
• The programme is for early to mid career professionals from any nation.
• Preference is given to degrees related to natural science, engineering, business or the environment.
• Applications are open from December 1st to February 1st for international students, and from March 15th to April 15th for Swedish students.
• The programme runs for one academic year from late August to June.
• Entry is competitive to ensure a high quality learning environment.
• Tuition is fully sponsored by the Swedish government.
• The programme is taught (and therefore requires proficiency) in English.
references + resources


