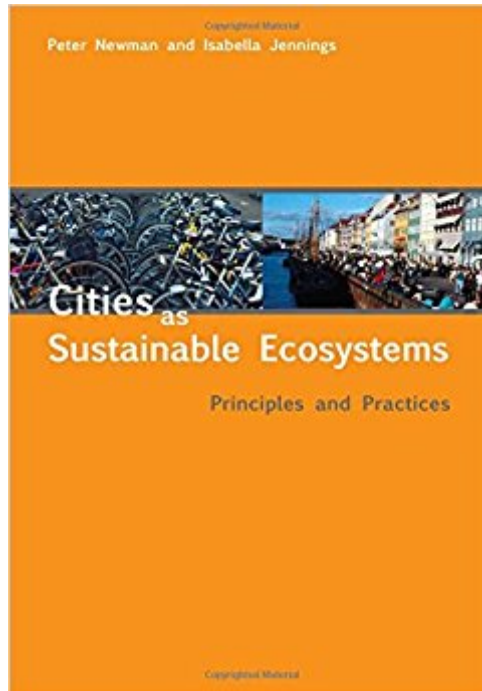




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# Cities As Sustainable Ecosystems: Principles And Practices



## Synopsis

Modern city dwellers are largely detached from the environmental effects of their daily lives. The sources of the water they drink, the food they eat, and the energy they consume are all but invisible, often coming from other continents, and their waste ends up in places beyond their city boundaries. *Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems* shows how cities and their residents can begin to reintegrate into their bioregional environment, and how cities themselves can be planned with nature's organizing principles in mind. Taking cues from living systems for sustainability strategies, Newman and Jennings reassess urban design by exploring flows of energy, materials, and information, along with the interactions between human and non-human parts of the system. Drawing on examples from all corners of the world, the authors explore natural patterns and processes that cities can emulate in order to move toward sustainability. Some cities have adopted simple strategies such as harvesting rainwater, greening roofs, and producing renewable energy. Others have created biodiversity parks for endangered species, community gardens that support a connection to their foodshed, and pedestrian-friendly spaces that encourage walking and cycling. A powerful model for urban redevelopment, *Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems* describes aspects of urban ecosystems from the visioning process to achieving economic security to fostering a sense of place.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Perhaps just in time, Newman and Jennings provide us with all the theory and practice we need to

salvage urban civilization. Their excellent book is now the best available guide to the reinvention of cities as sustainable regional ecosystems, human settlements that thrive on much-reduced eco-footprints." (William E. Rees Professor, School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia)"...the authors have written an excellent book on a subject of great interest and scope... the contents of this book will encourage readers to explore in greater detail the growing literature on urban ecology and urban sustainability, an end in itself that is a marvelous achievement." (Ecological Restoration)"Australian professor Peter Newman is credited with coining the term 'automobile independent' to describe the way most American and Australian cities were built in the last half of the 20th century." (The Oregonian)"Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems is a compendium of lists and theories that is a useful reference and for some potential guide to right living." (Worldchanging)"Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems advances an important idea about the relevance of systems thinking to design at the community and urban scale. Scaling up is a critical aspect to how we all need to be thinking; this book is an excellent guidepost." (William McDonough William McDonough + Partners)

Peter Newman is professor of city policy and director of the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia. He recently completed a Fulbright scholarship, which he spent at the University of Virginia studying sustainability initiatives in the U.S. He is the author of *Sustainability and Cities* (Island Press, 1999). ã Æ Isabella Jennings is a graduate student in the School of Environmental Science at Murdoch University. Her past and current research is related to the cities as sustainable ecosystems idea.

Minimal wear. A couple of stickers but nothing that affected the quality of the reading material.

Excellent work by experts in the field - used as part of the study work for a specific course at Curtin University and very useful as a general exposition of work required now and in the future.

This book comes across as presenting in-depth information on creating sustainability within cities by utilizing a systems approach. Instead, what it is is a long restatement of "the Ten Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities", a set of principles developed at a conference held in Melbourne, Australia. All of the principles are covered in the introduction. The authors then rehash them in ten chapters incorporating a lot of naivete along the way. One theme that keeps recurring in the book is the idea that indigenous cultures are more aware than other cultures of the importance of preserving

the ecosystems on which they depend. This is a good example of "survivor bias". The authors pay attention to cultures that have survived, ignoring all the failed indigenous cultures. They are also making a misleading statement about these cultures by suggesting their practices were such that they would have continued on had they not been interrupted by Europeans. The authors give some broad, non-science based introductions to topics like resilience, panarchy, and ecosystems, going so far as to misrepresent an ecosystem as some sort of smoothly running conflict-free process. Nature is cutthroat. It is unforgiving to elements that are causing problems. It is not the sort of place where the members are focused on "Fostering a sense of joy and belonging through rituals and celebrations following natural cycles" (p.47). Unless, of course, you see a bear taking down a moose then killing any animal that tries to interfere with his meal a joyful celebration. On the bright side, I think this book provides a lot of introductory information and some good references on the topics it addresses.

Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems presents a case for locally driven processes that model cities along the principles of ecosystems, and to integrate cities within bioregions. Newman and Jennings organize the book by the ten Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities. The Melbourne Principles were developed at an international charrette sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. Each chapter of Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems - the authors call it CASE - discusses one of the Melbourne Principles and describes strategies to achieve them. The authors present a comprehensive overview of all aspects of sustainability, backed by extensive research and best practice examples around the world. As a description of principles and a compendium of practices, I found the book at times somewhat a dense read. On the other hand, my tenacity was rewarded by a good framework for understanding city sustainability, and by many inspiring efforts. Of particular interest to me is the idea and methods for basing human societies and settlements on the characteristics of sustainable ecosystems: healthy (e.g. use of solar energy, cycling of matter), zero waste, self-regulation, resilience and self-renewal, and flexibility. Newman and Jennings do a good job of applying these characteristics to cities in a practical way. They build on these characteristics to discuss cities as clusters of eco-villages within bioregions. I read books first from the library to save my money for those I think will be valuable over time. Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems is one I bought.

I used this book as one of two texts for "Introduction to Urban Ecosystems". It presents an important new perspective on viewing cities. As such, I would also assign other readings on the chapter

topics. I reviewed many potential texts for my class and this one covered the topics that I thought were important. For the class, I used the Melbourne principles as a premise that served the topic well.

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