

*SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTS AND
ECO-TOURISM*

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Sustainable Developments and Eco-Tourism

Sustainability is simply about maintaining a healthy relationship with a place. The first step toward achieving sustainability in environmentally appropriate development is an in-depth site assessment - a study to evaluate the assets and liabilities of "Place" in terms that relate directly to the appropriateness of planned or existing use. The scope of considerations in such a study focus on the relationships between the factors that created and maintain the existing system, and the health, productivity and resilience of that whole. It is an intimate understanding of the connections between land, human, geologic, and natural history as well as the natural cycles and forces that play across a site that tells the story of Place - the breadth of the personality of our partner.

This level of familiarity enables us to engage in relationship with the land - to work with rather than against the Place that drew us into relationship. We can understand the limits or boundaries of such a relationship and the consequences of inappropriate development and technologies. Within these limits the elements of design can be placed in an array that not only complements the Whole we are about to join, but also allows safe, energy-efficient, comfortable, productive and aesthetically pleasing human habit. The advantages of entering into healthy relationship with place extend beyond preserving a healthy environment, our legacy to our descendants. It enables us to understand how to avoid dysfunctional designs, the antithesis of sustainability. Development that comes out of mutual relationship between meeting human needs and complementing the environmental process of a specific place has already recognized that the limits imposed on life there describe many of the possibilities for sustainable human habitat. A relationship with the land, with Place, implies development as a process rather than as a product and the environment as a symbiotic partner rather than an object.

A metaphor for healthy relationship with the whole is the attention and consideration given to water in sustainable design development. In an ethical, sustainable system of design, water is recognized as the most precious resource - the life's blood of a Place. Even in moist environments clean, potable, living water is becoming increasingly scarce. In the arid West appropriate design decisions are crucial and are expressed as immediate benefits or consequences, which we now glimpse through a heavy veil of denial. Every element of a design for an environmentally appropriate, sustainable development needs to address its relationship with water. Subdivision boundaries, access, crop systems, landscaping and architecture all are subservient to the whole, and the health of the whole is largely dependent on the abundance and quality of its water.

The issue:

How can water be held at its highest potential in this system?

Expanded or, rather, decompressed, that means:

How can our designs interact with the system's - our system's lifeblood - in a manner that retains its integrity, its purity, and its potential energy for as many cycles as possible before it finally leaves?

By ethical inference it also means:

How can this be achieved without degradation as an essential pure resource?

Through pragmatic, functional and sustainable values it means:

How can this be achieved in a way that not only increases the productivity of our system, our Place, but also in the process reduces the cost and maintenance of the human habitat there?

The ideal to strive for is to employ regenerative models to this end, as first presented by Mollison and subsequently echoed by Lile in their works on design. Regenerative systems, or in a smaller set regenerative design elements, replace themselves or grow in extent or sophistication with the passage of time. The chief distinction between the two lines in the complexity of organization, and the stability through different levels of mutually beneficial connections - relationship. Appropriate and stable systems are comprised of equally appropriate and beneficial design elements - all chosen to be site-specific and supportive.

Achieving environmental appropriate or sustenance development is really about engaging in a process or relationship with a Place on this earth. It encompasses all of the qualities of maintaining a healthy relationship: A willingness to intimately know oneself and to know one's partner with the same intimacy, respect for limits and boundaries, appreciation of the partner's virtues, mutual sharing and sacrifice, continual communication and reassessment, a zest for life and the joy of living, and commitment to be in relationship.