

---

## Preface

---

This book has, at its heart, a concern with taking stock, twenty years on from the influential Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), of the concept of sustainable development and its implications for the conduct of public policy. There is little doubt about the prominence of the term ‘sustainable development’ in contemporary debates about environmental and resources policy specifically and development policy more generally. Indeed, if anything the term itself has suffered from overuse alternatively as a panacea for all modern ills or as a meaningless catch-all theme to which all policy challenges (no matter of what complexion) are somehow inextricably linked. Nor is there consensus about what sustainable development is, which has led to another source of criticism.

All this has led some critics to dismiss the concept altogether as one further example of the triumph of rhetoric over substance. Such criticisms are understandable but ultimately undeserved and, in reflecting within these pages on what sustainable development is, how it can be achieved and how it can be measured, it is the aim of this volume to provide ample demonstration of this. What we can conclude from the contributions that follow is that while sustainable development does indeed imply a broad research and policy agenda (both in terms of its scale and its scope), it is also an agenda that is far more coherent than might appear to be the case at first glance. Much of this coherency stems from a shared concern about the development path that developed and developing countries (as well as the world as a whole) are on. For us, as others, this is the essential difference between saying that some action is ‘undesirable’ and saying that it is ‘unsustainable’. That is, undesirable actions may warrant the attentions of policy makers but are not necessarily the domain of concern about sustainable development.

That said, the evolving literature, coming as it does from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, contains a wide range of topics and policy challenges to study and respond to. We have not shied away from this diversity – of subject matter and approach – here. So, in initially mapping out the structure of this volume, we were immediately faced with the challenge of choosing what should be included. Some topics on our initial wish-list, without mentioning these by name, may have ended up being excluded for entirely pragmatic reasons usually to do with the availability of authors. We are hopeful, however, that no central topic has failed to make it into the finished volume because of these reasons. More generally, we sought to be comprehensive, yet

not encyclopaedic, and to reflect the contributions that different intellectual disciplines and policy foci have brought to the fore without pretending that we could do justice to all. While making such judgements was no easy feat, we have found the process of putting together this volume to be an illuminating experience.

In particular, we have been delighted to have such high quality contributions from current *and*, just as significantly, future research leaders in such a wide variety of fields. We, therefore, hope that the final volume provides a broad but accessible snap-shot of the sustainable development literature that many from a variety of disciplinary or policy backgrounds will find of interest. While at least some of the concepts and ideas in these chapters have been around for considerably longer than the Brundtland Report, we find it hard to escape the conclusion that this literature has come a long way in a relatively short space of time. That there is surely much more to come in the future makes working in this field all the more worthwhile.

Sadly, during the latter stages of preparing this volume for submission for publication, one of our contributors, David Pearce, passed away suddenly. Those working in this field owe much to David who made huge contributions, most significantly in 1989 with the seminal *Blueprint for a Green Economy* (or *Blueprint 1* or just *Blueprint* as it is also commonly known). While there is an undercurrent, in the sustainability literature, of ‘who said what, first’ with regards to key concepts, it is fair to say that so much of what is now the received wisdom originated in *Blueprint*. David continued to make a number of important contributions to this debate over the ensuing years. We are proud to be able to include one of his last writings on the topic of sustainable development here and we humbly dedicate this volume to David’s memory.

GA  
SD  
EN