

Local Sustainability Policies and Programs as Economic Development:
Is the New Economic Development Sustainable Development?

Abstract

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This paper will contrast the expectation that cities taking sustainability more seriously do so at their economic peril with the finding that the opposite seems to be true. Cities that are the most committed to the pursuit of sustainability also experience the greatest economic growth, at least among the largest 55 cities in the U.S. This finding raises numerous questions that will be explored, all stemming from the central issue of whether this relationship is, in some way, spurious? Is it an artifact of some other, perhaps more mainstream, view of local economic development? Or does it reflect a new economic reality facing major American cities? Using data from surveys of local public officials (city councilors and city administrators), information about cities' sustainability programs and policies, and U.S. Census data, this paper tests the hypothesis that the pursuit of sustainability, especially environmental protection, represents a new and effective pathway to local economic development.