

Implementing Sustainable Development on the Local Level: Governance, Institutions, and the Effectiveness of Policy Implementation

By Samuel R. Staley

Abstract

This paper will examine the institutional constraints faced by governments attempting to implement sustainable development policies on the local level. Local governments in the U.S. are limited in their ability to implement comprehensive strategies, and these constraints can be imposed by local political culture, social tolerance, and state statute. An important source of uncertainty is the definition of sustainable development and, as a consequence, defining relevant performance measures. To more fully understand the dynamics political, economic, and social institutions play in facilitating or inhibiting sustainable development policies, this paper will examine the experiences and sustainable development policies of three cities: Houston, a large market-based economy that has achieved substantial infill development but lacks a political culture that embraces aggressive government-led policy initiatives; Santa Monica, a small city in Southern California with a political climate well suited to aggressive implementation of sustainable development policies; and Vancouver, British Columbia, a mid-size Canadian city that is aggressively pursuing sustainable development goals and aspires to be the world's "greenest" city by 2050. All three cities operate in different political, economic, and statutory institutional contexts, and their experiences should provide valuable lessons for elected officials, policymakers and researchers focused on policy implementation.