


Chapter 3

Cultural and Social Norms Supporting Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary markets and societal norms, critical ecosystem services for a sustainable future are often externalised. ‘Societal levers’ legal, market, and social mechanisms shape resource managers’ behavior and societal expectations, institutionalising evolving values. Using the STEEP framework (social, technological, economic, environmental, political), we analyse how emerging concerns become shared and transform into societal levers, reshaping norms. For influence, concerns must resonate across societal sectors and STEEP dimensions. We propose a ‘ripple effect’ of values to accelerate the integration of environmental concerns into mainstream norms, institutionalising them as societal levers. This approach aligns societal values with ecosystem preservation, fostering a sustainable future.

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETAL LEVERS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability and ecosystem services are key to ensuring healthy ecosystems in the long run, and involve ensuring that natural resources are used in a way that meets current needs while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability is the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level in environmental, economic and social dimensions through a variety of aspects of life. Provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services are all aspects of

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ecosystem services adequate for maintaining environmental health. Sustainability, an umbrella term, relates to the provision of multiple ecosystem services, and sustainability and ecosystem services interact in complex ways.

Definition of Sustainability

- The ability to continue means not to exhaust the Earth so that environmental quality and human well-being can be preserved for forthcoming generations.
- It covers three major angles: environmental, economic, and social, which should be considered equal in order to accomplish sustainability (Gonzalez-Redin et al., 2024) (Goymer, 2014).
- The term “sustainability” is often associated with sustainable development – that is, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (Diepenmaat et al., 2020).

The Role of Ecosystem Services in Long-term Environmental Health

- Ecosystem services are human benefits derived from an ecosystem ranging from food provision, climate regulation, nutrient cycling, and recreational opportunities (Thiemann et al., 2022).
- Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services can have serious consequences for human health/our survival and economic activities (Goymer, 2014).
- There is a need to understand the complex interactions of social, economic and ecological systems and formulate policies that promote ecosystem services conservation and sustainable use in an integrated framework (Everard et al., 2014) (Peter, 2020).
- Societal levers, such as market-based instruments, legislation, and social norms, can support or hinder the delivery and management of ecosystem services so that they align with sustainability values and goals (Everard et al., 2016) (Everard et al., 2014).

Societal Levers and Sustainability

- Societal levers mechanisms that draw societal norms and behaviors toward sustainability by embedding pro-environmental values
- They include legal instruments, economic incentives, and social norms and practices that inform resource governance and shape societal norms (Everard et al., 2016) (Everard et al., 2014).

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