

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0959-6526(17)30442-0

DOI: [10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.03.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.03.008)

Reference: JCLP 9135

To appear in: *Journal of Cleaner Production*

Received Date: 23 December 2015

Revised Date: 26 January 2017

Accepted Date: 1 March 2017

Please cite this article as: Guillen-Royo M, Guardiola J, Garcia-Quero F, Sustainable development in times of economic crisis: A needs-based illustration from Granada (Spain), *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.03.008.

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Sustainable development in times of economic crisis: A needs-based illustration from Granada (Spain)

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Abstract

This paper illustrates the importance of a balanced approach to sustainable development through the analysis of needs-based workshops in Granada, a Spanish city hit hard by the recent economic crisis. The workshops followed Max-Neef's Human Scale Development proposal that highlights the interdependence of social, economic and environmental systems and stresses the centrality of participatory processes and human needs satisfaction. This understanding of human development aligns with the approach to sustainable development popularised by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, which called for the satisfaction of the needs of both current and future generations together with a balanced articulation of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development.

In practice, and even more so in times of economic crisis, governments are seen to prioritise the economic dimension over the environmental and the societal dimensions through their primary focus on policies to foster economic growth. However, people experiencing unemployment and poor economic prospects may not be in favour of this unbalanced, economic-driven approach. In Granada, participants in needs-based workshops did not emphasise the importance of economic prosperity and job creation when discussing policy goals and interventions to improve needs satisfaction. Economic interventions, such as providing universal coverage of basic needs, were seen as interdependent with personal and institutional transformations aimed at empowering workers and promoting citizen participation, and with environmental initiatives concerning the conservation of local natural spaces and the spread of urban gardening.

Keywords

Sustainable development, empowerment, Human Scale Development, green economy, participation, wellbeing.

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