

# Accepted Manuscript

Original Article/Research

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PII: S2212-6090(17)30067-5  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijbsbe.2017.10.002>  
Reference: IJSBE 191

To appear in: *International Journal of Sustainable Built Environment*

Received Date: 25 March 2017  
Revised Date: 25 June 2017  
Accepted Date: 20 October 2017



Please cite this article as: A. Takala, Understanding sustainable development in Finnish water supply and sanitation services, *International Journal of Sustainable Built Environment* (2017), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijbsbe.2017.10.002>

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## Understanding sustainable development in Finnish water supply and sanitation services

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### Abstract

Water supply and sanitation services are essential to human and environmental well-being. Globally one of the biggest challenges to sustainable development is lack of access to improved water supply and sanitation services. Yet it is less obvious what sustainable development means in countries with high coverage of these services. In this article sustainable development is explored from the perspective of Finnish water supply and sanitation services. The study consists of eight semi-structured interviews with water sector experts and their views are analysed in relation to literature. In this article sustainable development is understood as a learning process and dialogue of values.

The interviewed water sector experts primarily perceive sustainable development from an environmental point of view, and treat it in a rationalistic and mechanistic manner. Challenges are tackled by technological fixes, such as improving energy and material efficiency. It is argued in this paper that this kind of approach undermines the complexity and dynamicity of sustainable development and can suppress learning. Sustainable development is mostly explored only from the perspective of water services, although some of the interviewees recognise their role for wider societal development. Interaction and dialogue between water sector experts and the community regarding sustainable development is lacking or skills to accomplish this interaction are inadequate.

*Keywords: sustainable development; water supply services; sanitation services; Finland*

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Water supply and sanitation services are essential to human and environmental well-being. Globally one of the biggest challenges to sustainable development is lack of access to improved water supply and sanitation services. Yet it is less obvious what sustainable development means in countries with high coverage of these services. In this article sustainable development is explored from the perspective of Finnish water supply and sanitation services. The study consists of eight semi-structured interviews with water sector experts and their views are analysed in relation to literature. In this article sustainable development is understood as a learning process and dialogue of values.

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