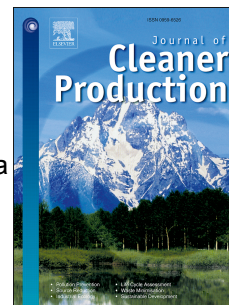


# Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0959-6526(14)00629-5

DOI: [10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.06.041](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.06.041)

Reference: JCLP 4436

To appear in: *Journal of Cleaner Production*

Received Date: 19 April 2013

Revised Date: 13 June 2014

Accepted Date: 14 June 2014

Please cite this article as: Bolis I, Morioka SN, Sznelwar LI, When sustainable development risks losing its meaning. Delimiting the concept with a comprehensive literature review and a conceptual model, *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2014), doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.06.041.

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# When sustainable development risks losing its meaning. Delimiting the concept with a comprehensive literature review and a conceptual model

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of sustainable development still need more scientific discussion in order to help decision making processes. The polysemy of the term sustainability has undermined the credibility of the concept, leading, among other effects, to the inability to translate discourse into practical actions and to distortive appropriations of the term. The purpose of this article is to propose a basis for discussion to demarcate the concept. In this context, the paper conducted a literature review on the theme, encompassing an exploratory approach and a systematic hermeneutics analysis of the literature. Based on a structured discussion of the evidence collected in papers and books, we developed a conceptual model named Sustainable Development with an Axiological Perspective, encompassing three dimensions: human needs (including social and economic aspects), natural resources (making explicit Earth's limitations) and decision perspective (under axiological point of view). The model proposes that sustainable development can be seen as development that aims improving human well being for the whole society (also for future generations), enabled by an axiological perspective for decision-making processes, considering environmental resources limitations. The model explicitly includes a value-based mindset in the concept of sustainable development, as pointed out by the axiological perspective. This perspective is intrinsic to the main definitions of sustainability, but it is not explicit in the models and in the literature on sustainable development.

**Keywords:** sustainability, sustainable development, axiological perspective, environmental, decision-making processes, comprehensive review.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is a confusing concept that has evolved steadily over the last three decades, according to Faber et al. (2005). There is a plethora of definitions and opinions about the concept of sustainability (Kirkby et al., 1995; Lindsey, 2011). Numerous definitions of the concept have arisen from different disciplines and perspectives (ecology, economics, sociology, biology, etc.) that focus on specific elements while failing to capture the whole spectrum (Mebratu, 1998). However, they are often difficult to compare due to their disparity (Dale, 2001). The concept of sustainability means many things to different people, and this diversity of meaning tends to increase. Gatto (1995) questions whether this concept is well defined. Highlighting the three most widely used definitions (by biologists, ecologists and economists),

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