

ALL-ROUND SOLUTIONS

A tool to assess sustainability developed by WSU researchers is making a global difference.

Managing enormous populations calls for solutions to immense problems, such as how to create fast, convenient transport with minimal air pollution and how to inspire social cohesion. A research team at Western Sydney University has developed practical tools to address such problems and facilitate the creation of sustainable cities and communities.

Professor Paul James, Dr Liam Magee and their colleagues have created a method for assessing and managing social and environmental sustainability that goes beyond early tools such as the 'profit, people and planet' approach of the triple-bottom line.

"Triple-bottom line set economics as the core consideration. Despite the attempt to get beyond this focus, it allowed companies to go back to the economic bottom line," says James.

"Our method is more comprehensive because it brings cultural and political issues to the fore."

They call the method Circles of Sustainability and it integrates cultural, political, ecological and economic data and presents them as circle diagrams. It highlights strengths and weaknesses, and most importantly, it points to where there are tensions.

"We provoke cities to confront the tensions and contradictions of their own policies," says James.

NEED TO KNOW

- WSU research has developed a tool to assess the sustainability of cities
- It has been adopted around the world

Michael Müller, mayor of Berlin, says, "Circles of Sustainability is an extraordinary guide to our way forward. By bringing together the clear insight of political analysts with the citizen-oriented perspective of experienced practitioners, [it] changes the paradigm of urban

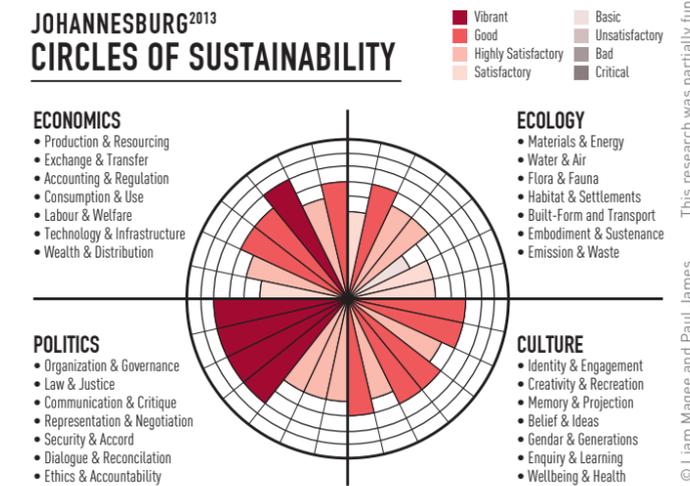
studies. It... will be used by cities such as Berlin as we seek a better world together." The team used the tool to understand why a new rapid bus transit system created to address spatial apartheid in Johannesburg, South Africa, was under-utilised. The analysis showed that the city hadn't considered the culture of the local community.

"People were reluctant to leave behind a gang-based minivan service, and were distrustful of the new service, even though it cost the same."

"The initial system was also developed around credit cards, but the people of Soweto did not trust banks," says James.

"The big shift came when they renamed the bus system 'Corridors of Freedom' and started employing the minivan drivers as bus drivers. The drivers were already known to the community and were happy to have more secure employment," says Professor James.

Circles of Sustainability is now being used all over the world, and has been adopted by Metropolis, a global network of 130 cities. ■



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