

explainity explains: Sustainability

This is Peter. Peter is a teacher. He's sure, that he leads a sustainable life. He buys organic products at the supermarket, rides to work on a bike, and his lights use green electricity. But is that really sustainable living?

Let's go back to the beginning. Even in the 18th century, people were interested in the environment. For example, Carl von Carlowitz realized that you shouldn't cut down more trees than will grow again to replace them. So, he had recognized the basic principle of sustainability.

Nowadays, sustainability is seen as a global concept. This can be explained with the help of the three-pillar model. The model is based on environmental, economic, and social considerations which must always be regarded as belonging together.

First, the environmental pillar. It includes, among other things, climate protection which is widespread. Protection of resources and biodiversity. Also, food should be grown organically. That is, we should stop using pesticides and farm animals should be given fodder produced on the farm. We must use natural resources more sparingly, too. One of them is petrol, which we need for our cars, but, sooner or later, this resource will be exhausted, so there'll be no fuel for the cars. This is why we're looking very hard for an environmentally friendly alternative, so that future generations will have environmentally friendly cars. Electric ones, for example.

The next pillar is the economy; that is, business and industry. In future, at the supermarket, Peter should only find produce that's in season in his region, like strawberries in summer. Mangos from Brazil, or bananas from Colombia, and Ecuador, arrive by air from a very long way away. Transporting them causes a lot of pollution.

The third pillar of sustainability is the social element. Goals here include, for example, better education and training opportunities, equal rights for men and women, fighting poverty, and prosperity for the whole of humanity. One beverage manufacturer from an industrialized country has quite a bit of catching up to do here. It repeatedly takes over the wells of villages in India, because it needs the water to make its products there. That isn't very sustainable. Peter doesn't think so either. After all, at least a little water should be left in the wells for the Indian population.

So, Peter tries to do justice to the three-pillar model: when he buys organically grown produce, when he goes to work on his bike, and by using green power from wind turbines. He really does live sustainably.

But be careful. A lot of companies exploit consumers' environmental awareness. Not all the products that claim to be from Fairtrade or organic farming are sustainable. It's up to consumers to be well-informed about the products they're consuming.

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