

# Sustainability in the City and Beyond

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## What is urban sprawl and why does it matter?

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Current trends in land uptake for built-up areas in many parts of the world clearly contradict the spirit and principles of sustainability. Urban sprawl is an example of the tragedy of the commons. Urban sprawl in Montreal and Quebec City has turned into a fast growing problem since the 1980s. Urban sprawl in these two cities has become worse than ever before. In addition, the rate of urban sprawl has increased faster than ever before. In Montreal, urban sprawl has increased exponentially in the last 30 years, doubling every 15 years. It appears to have gotten out of control. Current decisions on urban development will lock future generations into a city structure that will affect their quality of life and automobile dependence, as well as the state of the natural environment, availability of agricultural land etc.; is now a question of intergenerational justice. M. Pourali will report on the changes in the density of inhabitants in built-up areas across Canada 1971-2011. C. Townsend will present urban sprawl reduction policies that have been put in place in Canada so far. Without more rigorous measures, scenarios of future urban sprawl for Switzerland for 2050 show that sprawl will continue to increase strongly, but a small number of examples from Switzerland also demonstrate that sprawl can be reduced. As a consequence of intense public discussion, the Swiss Spatial Planning Act was revised in 2013 to make it tighter. Urban sprawl has recently been implemented in Switzerland's landscape monitoring system. Banks can help avoid urban sprawl, such as the Alternative Bank of Switzerland (ABS) does, by not giving loans to projects that would strongly contribute to urban sprawl, i.e., a divestment from urban sprawl. (Recommended reading: Nazarnia, N., Schwick, C., Jaeger, J.A.G. (2016): Accelerated urban sprawl in Montreal, Quebec City, and Zurich: Investigating the differences using time series 1951-2011. *Ecological Indicators* 60: 1229-1251.)



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