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## More than One Way to Sustainability

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, also known as the Rio Earth Summit, brought unprecedented attention to the ecological interconnectedness of a globalized world. And in doing so, it also established a foundation for comparative analysis of nations' environmental policies and actions.

Comparative analyses can serve a very useful and progressive purpose in helping nations' environmental commitments remain on track. However, often these analyses are used by external pressure groups in a more negative manner, drawing attention to a nation's shortcomings to shame them into action by comparing them to the strengths of another.

The most common criticism by external pressure groups is the claim that all other nations are significantly lagging behind Europe's environmental progress and need to follow suit. The unfortunate assumption here is that there is only one road to sustainability and environmental progress.

There is no doubt that Europe has made great strides in the area of environmental regulations. Take for example London's congestion charging, which imposes a daily levy on driving within the city centre and re-invests the money in public transit and other environmental remediation projects; or the significant subsidies to support solar photovoltaic energy generation in Germany. But even though the 'top-down' approach to implementing change works well in Europe, it should not be perceived as the only viable and successful path towards sustainability.

In fact, a different approach towards sustainable lifestyles is developing right here in Fredericton - an approach built not on regulation and enforcement but rather on a voluntary internalization of more holistic values in individual lifestyles. The Fredericton community progresses towards greater sustainability everyday as individuals make conscious decisions to find a more harmonious balance between the natural and the lived environments.

Such commitment can be witnessed in the nearly overflowing community recycling depots, the increasing use of public and active transportation, the prominence of reusable bags, the growing presence of alternative energy technologies throughout the city, and the declining presence of unnecessary practices such as day-time lawn-watering. And all this in the absence of regulations and enforcement.

Businesses are also participating in the creation of Fredericton's sustainable future by reducing their own environmental footprints, while providing products and services to help their customers do the same, as evidenced by the growing number of participants in Fredericton's own *Green Shops* program.

A critical mass develops as more and more people make decisions that result in a shift of social norms. Over time, living with a balance that places environment as high on citizens' priority list as social and economic advancement is no longer considered an 'initiative' or a 'project', but simply a contemporary Fredericton lifestyle.

Such a 'bottom-up' approach towards greater sustainability is often over-looked in formal comparative analyses as it lacks the glamorous appeal of large-scale revolutionary policies such as emissions trading, congestion charging, and photovoltaic subsidies. However, critics of Fredericton's environmental commitment should take note that there exists a wide array of paths towards sustainability, each with inherent strengths and weaknesses.

Naturally, it would be wise to keep an open mind and benefit from lessons learned elsewhere, but to unquestionably assume that another jurisdiction's approach to sustainability is superior is an injustice to Fredericton's progress to date. The Fredericton community is finding a greater balance between the natural and the lived environments every day, and for this it should be recognized and encouraged.

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