

Portland, USA

EcoDistricts: regenerating cities from the neighborhood up

EcoDistricts brings together “city makers” from the private and public spheres to link institutions, design and technology, communications and user behavior to advance sustainability at the neighborhood scale, creating resilient, vibrant, resource-efficient urban districts.

Urban NEXUS Case Story 2014 - 18

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The project in brief

Formerly known as the Portland Sustainability Institute, EcoDistricts is an entrepreneurial non-profit established in 2009 by then Portland Mayor, Sam Adams. EcoDistricts works to revitalize metropolitan sustainable development at the neighbourhood and district scale through advocacy, training and design through civic public-private partnerships. The overall goal is to unite and assist local governments, developers, business, residents, utilities, community-based organizations and civic entrepreneurs in the planning, design and research, finance and delivery of neighborhood projects, which place sustainability at their forefront.

As of 2014, EcoDistricts rolled out the EcoDistricts Protocol to offer a framework for the renewal of sustainable cities commencing at district level. Through eight outcome-based performance areas and a four-step process, over 60 project partners and a range of North American Target cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Cambridge, Denver, Los Angeles, Ottawa, Ontario and Washington, D.C, have committed to scale up 1,300 acres of existing neighborhoods to host sustainable, socially equitable, economical, low-impact and integrated infrastructure services. In order to achieve this, the two-year Target City Program focuses heavily on governance and leadership models to coalesce a NEXUS of institutions and stakeholders committed to attaining sustainable change through measurable and verifiable strategies.

What makes it "Urban NEXUS"?

EcoDistricts' builds sustainable communities from the neighbourhood scale upwards, through the Urban NEXUS institutionalization of a wide range of stakeholders. Thusly, EcoDistricts operationalizes their work via clusters of collaborators to break down 'silos' and link local governments, research institutions, think tanks, planners, utilities, technical experts, community associations, developers and investors to realize optimized neighbourhood growth. Through the provision of a Framework, tools, training and services to policymakers and urban practitioners, social and environmental challenges in a variety of urban contexts are addressed, while ensuring the infrastructural and economic needs of urban communities are met.



Date	2009-ongoing
NEXUS Sectors	Water-Energy-Transport-Social-Housing
NEXUS Innovations	Institutions Design and Technology, Communications and User Behaviors
Scale	Neighborhood and district-scale
Budget	\$US 550,000 (2012 expenses)

Urban NEXUS Definition

The Urban NEXUS is an approach to the design of sustainable urban development solutions. The approach guides stakeholders to identify and pursue possible synergies between sectors, jurisdictions, and technical domains, so as to increase institutional performance, optimize resource management, and service quality.

It counters traditional sectoral thinking, trade-offs, and divided responsibilities that often result in poorly coordinated investments, increased costs, and underutilized infrastructures and facilities. The ultimate goal of the Urban NEXUS approach is to accelerate access to services, and to increase service quality and the quality of life within our planetary boundaries.

ICLEI / GIZ 2014

Further Reading

EcoDistricts official website: <http://ecodistricts.org/>

EcoDistricts, 2013, The EcoDistricts Framework: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/6F915B3C-4206-437A-8798-C595D5729901/0/EcoDistrictsFrameworkMay2013.pdf> (20 Aug 2014)

Ecodistricts, 2012, Annual Project Report: http://ecodistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/EcoDistricts_AnnualReport.pdf (20 Aug 2014)

Ecodistricts, Making EcoDistricts. Concepts & Methods for Advancing Sustainability in Neighborhoods, 2010: http://ecodistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/making_ecodistricts_concepts_and_methods_for_advancing_sustainability_in_neighborhoods.pdf

GIZ and ICLEI, 2014, Operationalizing the Urban NEXUS: towards resource efficient and integrated cities and metropolitan regions, GIZ Study: www.iclei.org/urbanexus

Scope for improvement

EcoDistricts focuses on sustainable development at the scale of urban districts and neighborhoods, particularly relating to the improved integration of services. However, when scaling up services there are potential limits as to how far EcoDistricts' ambitions may extend, based on prevailing infrastructural systems and jurisdictions on the city-wide level. Thusly, it is imperative to ensure a robust dialogue between relevant stakeholders and sectors at the city-level, especially concerning the modification of existing regulations or incentives to guide investment and user behavior.

Replication

The underlying principal of the EcoDistricts approach is to facilitate replication of innovative sustainable policy and development in varying geographic and cultural settings. In order to accelerate sustainable neighborhood upgrading processes, the EcoDistricts Framework has been expanded to serve as a "hands on" tool for city planners throughout the globe via the Global Protocol consisting of clear eco-district guidelines and methodologies to support the transformation of the built urban environment at the neighbourhood level.

Acknowledgements

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