

Industry Paper

The Legacy of the Ecocity World Summit 2019

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Practitioner Report

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ABSTRACT: Ecocity Builders is a non-profit organization headquartered in Canada with a core team consisting of academics, architects, engineers and urban planners. Since 1990, they organize the biennial Ecocity World Summit as part of their wider mission and strategies for reshaping cities for the long-term health of human and natural systems. This brief report highlights their collaboration with the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) in hosting the Ecocity World Summit 2019 in Vancouver. The Centre for Ecocities emerged as a lasting legacy initiative to support the development of socially just cities in balance with nature around the world.

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A Foundation Built by Ecocity Builders

Founded in 1992 by ecocity pioneer Richard Register and a core group of ecologists and activists to further a set of specific goals outlined at the first International Ecocity Conference in Berkeley in 1990, Ecocity Builders continued to advance the body and practice of the ecocity movement that had begun in 1975 with Register's previous nonprofit, Urban Ecology. Utilizing ecological urban planning, design, ecology, education, advocacy, policy and public participation to build healthier cities for both people and nature, Ecocity Builders' early years were characterized by several local projects in the San Francisco East Bay.

Ecocity Builders develop and implement policy, design and educational tools and strategies to build thriving urban centres based on "access by proximity" and to reverse patterns of sprawl and excessive consumption. Ecocity Builders and associates' definition of "ecocity" is conditional upon a healthy relationship of the city's parts and functions, similar to the relationship of organs in living complex organisms. They are concerned with city design, planning, building, and operations in an integral way and relation to the surrounding environment and natural resources of the region, utilizing organic, ecological and whole-systems lessons to reverse the negative impacts of climate change, species

extinction and the destruction of the biosphere. Ecocity Builders believe the form of the city matters, and that it is within our ability, and indeed crucial, to reshape and restructure cities to address global environmental challenges (Ecocity Builders, 2023b).

Ecocity Builders' Mission and Strategies

An important step in the process of addressing urban challenges and creating effective solutions is the ability to understand, measure and quantify the environmental impacts of cities, for example, in terms of consumption of energy and natural resources and generation of waste. To provide a practical methodology for such measurement, Ecocity Builders have been developing the Ecocity Framework & Standards Initiative, organized through 18 conditions within four fundamental urban pillars (Ecocity Builders, 2023c)

For standards to be meaningful, there is a need for detailed, accurate data and information about local urban environmental conditions, as well as social and economic conditions that affect both the immediate quality of life for residents and the long-term resilience and sustainability of urban areas. Furthermore, access to such data and information is a key consideration, both for citizens (so that they can be involved in governance and action to improve environmental conditions and quality of life) and for governments (to support good public policy, decision making and urban management).

To that end, the Urbinsight project (www.ecocitybuilders.org/urbinsight) is currently being developed to strengthen sustainable lifeways and urban systems within a place-based cultural context and to increase social awareness through a broad vision that promotes public participation, integration, cooperation, equity and social justice.

Overall, Ecocity Builders pursue three main goals:

1. Catalyze a new transdisciplinary approach to urban data management and data representations that can inform local action.
2. Provide essential metrics, knowledge and platforms for understanding the relationship between nature, culture and the built environment.
3. Support community-led solutions as part of a just transition towards a healthier and equitable world.

Collaboratively, Ecocity Builders deploy the following strategies to achieve these goals:

- Create and innovate Participatory Urban Metabolism Information Systems (PUMIS) and Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS).
- Curate community mapping and IT to enable neighbourhoods to build their own 'community atlases' as a way to inform each other on key issues and build social capital.
- Demonstrate the first-of-its-kind "barefoot" bottom-up approach to environmental accounting and gap-filling.
- Convene the world's leading experts and practitioners to develop standard protocols for easy and rapid visualizations of urban metabolism.

- Converge on key issues to help inform key policy initiatives at the global, national and local levels.
- Collaborate with like-minded organizations around the world to describe the overall health of the urban ecosystem (city)
- Promote key indicators for ecologically healthy urban design, bio-geo-physical conditions, socio-cultural conditions and addressing ecological imperatives.
- Educate and inform cities, policymakers, practitioners, service providers and citizens through democratic and accessible data initiatives, tools, resources, programs and partnerships.

One of the tools to implement the strategies mentioned above is the Ecocity World Summit, first held in 1990 in Berkeley, USA. The Ecocity World Summit is the pioneer and longest-running global conference on ecology and cities. Every two years it brings together over 1,000 urban stakeholders from across the globe to focus on key actions cities and citizens can take to rebuild our human habitat in balance with living systems. The upcoming summit will be hosted in London in 2023.

The 12th summit in 2019 was organized in collaboration with BCIT, the City of Vancouver, and Tourism Vancouver at the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Parallel events were also held across all BCIT campuses to maximize opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to participate in the conference. International partners and institutions were also encouraged to share their knowledge in these educational opportunities. Informed by the International Ecocity Standards and the Summit's theme of Building the Bridge to Socially Just and Ecologically Sustainable Cities, the Centre is now moving forward by working with ten municipalities across British Columbia, including Vancouver, to help them close their sustainability gap.

The Ecocity World Summit was designed to build capacity locally through inclusive tiered pricing and a special side event for local governments. Staff from several municipalities in the province of British Columbia participated in a customized training workshop to test a tool that helps them measure and manage the carbon and ecological footprints of their cities. This ecoCity Footprint Tool was developed by Dr Jennie Moore of BCIT to help communities evaluate how much local consumption habits are contributing to climate change and using up the planet's natural resources.

The Summit also provided academics and emerging scholars a place to share cutting-edge research about ecocities. The event was organized with strategic partners including UN-Habitat, the UN Environment Programme, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

This 2019 Ecocity World Summit event won the 2020 Incredible Impacts Award, presented collaboratively by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and the BestCities Global Alliance.

The new BCIT Centre for Ecocities: a legacy for Vancouver, British Columbia, and the World

To continue the summit momentum, BCIT established the Centre for Ecocities as a legacy of the collaboration of academics and practitioners on issues of sustainable cities. This first of its kind worldwide, provides research, applied education, and the tools and advisory support needed to close the sustainability gap in cities. It anchors the global leadership of BCIT in the restructuring of cities to reduce their carbon and ecological footprints while simultaneously regenerating natural habitats.

The Centre has also received support from the Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC) and the Vancity credit union to assist municipalities evaluate their sustainability efforts, mapping pathways for reducing emissions and ecological degradation, and engaging residents in taking complementary actions. The online Ecocity Footprint Tool and Lighter Footprint App have been devised to make it easier for local governments to report on ecological impacts and engage with citizens in ecocity solutions.

Some key initiatives from the BCIT Centre for Ecocities since its inception:

- Ecocity Peer Network of municipalities that are exploring actions they can take to address local consumption impacts and move towards one-planet living.
- Climate Changemakers Youth Leadership training delivered to participants from around the world in collaboration with UN-Habitat and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), following up from a Canadian pilot training in collaboration with Colleges and Institutes Canada. The training supports climate action in cities by youth, the most engaged climate emergency demographic.
- Research in collaboration with the École de technologie supérieure at the Université du Québec and other experts to explore how living within Earth's carrying capacity (ECC) can be measured and managed at the city scale. This project was supported by a grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada.

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