

Social Sustainability, Past and Future

In this Open Access book, Sander van der Leeuw examines how the modern world has been caught in a socioeconomic dynamic that has generated the conundrum of sustainability. Combining the methods of social science and complex systems science, he explores how western, developed nations have globalized their world view and how that view has led to the sustainability challenges we are now facing. Its central theme is the coevolution of cognition, demography, social organization, technology, and environmental impact. Beginning with the earliest human societies, van der Leeuw links the distant past with the present in order to demonstrate how the information and communications technology revolution is undermining many of the institutional pillars on which contemporary societies have been constructed. An original view of social evolution as the history of human information-processing, his book shows how the past offers insight into the present and can help us deal with the future.

Sander van der Leeuw is Foundation Professor in the Schools of Sustainability and Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. Trained as an archaeologist and historian, he specializes in long-term interactions between humans and their environments and pioneers the application of the complex adaptive systems approach to socioenvironmental challenges, technology, and innovation. Van der Leeuw is the author and editor of eighteen books. In 2012, he was awarded the “Champion of the Earth for Science and Innovation” prize by the United Nations Environment Program.

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Social Sustainability, Past and Future

*Undoing Unintended Consequences
for the Earth's Survival*

SANDER VAN DER LEEUW

Arizona State University and Santa Fe Institute



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108498692

DOI: [10.1017/9781108595247](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108595247)

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI [10.1017/9781108595247](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108595247)

First published 2020

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Leeuw, Sander Ernst van der, author.

TITLE: Social sustainability, past and future : undoing unintended consequences for the earth's survival / Sander Van der Leeuw, Arizona State University.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press 2019.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2019021301 | ISBN 9781108498692 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781108724425 (paperback)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Environmental sociology. | Sustainable development--Social aspects. | Environmentalism--Social aspects. | Sustainability--Social aspects.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC GE195 .L423 2019 | DDC 304.2--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019021301>

ISBN 978-1-108-49869-2 Hardback

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