TOWARDS A 'NEW' MENTAL MODEL OF SUSTAINABILITY

*Tobias Luthe¹, Michael von Kutzschenbach²
¹University of Applied Sciences HTW Chur, Switzerland
²University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland, Switzerland

Sustainability is an inflationary used term that has been more and more diffusing into public awareness. Globalization, population growth, environmental and social catastrophes, cultural inequalities, mobility patterns, growing demand for energy, and limited natural resources in an ever increasingly fast moving and interconnected world bring the concept of sustainability to the forefront of daily discussions in the public press, in politics, in the corporate sector, and in education.

Despite of its importance and need, sustainability is a complex concept that is often misunderstood and misused, and difficult to display. New efforts are needed to better communicate sustainability to the broader public to enable a wide societal participation for the transition towards a sustainable society. In this paper we draw from the existing conceptualization and communication of sustainability in its widely accepted three pillar model, given its simplicity. The three pillar model has shortcomings, however, since it first equally weights the ecological with the economic and the social sphere, while it is widely accepted that the ecological fundament must be of higher relevance. Second, there are three further dimensions missing – the technological, the participative and the cultural. We thus propose a new model addressing both shortcomings, while maintaining a sufficient simplicity to make it widely usable. This new, simple but rich model in the shape of a building may contribute to develop new mental models in the public understanding of sustainability.

*Keywords: mental model, ecosystem services, cultural values*

*Presenting author*