

# Permaculture: A way of thinking

Permaculture has been accurately described as a way of thinking. The concept of systems thinking is at its core.

Systems thinking in design considers all aspects of the design process, from participatory planning, through implementation of the design to the handing over of the project to those who will use it. It includes the:

- types and sources of materials and technologies
- processes of finding design solutions
- ways of working with others
- methods of implementing the design and its continued management

## WHAT IS PERMACULTURE?

Permaculture is a system of applied design for the places we live – our homes, our neighbourhoods and our communities.

As well as these physical things, permaculture's ethics can be adopted as a set of personal values and, combined with permaculture's principles, can influence our relationships and dealings with other people.

Developed in Tasmania in the 1970s by the then-academic, Dr Bill Mollison, and student of environmental design, David Holmgren, permaculture is based on a set of principles and is guided by the ethics of:

- care for the earth
- care for people
- sharing of our surplus resources

## Synthesis

Permaculture is a synthesis of elements taken from disciplines such as farming, architecture, town planning, biology, horticulture, landscape design, community development, economics and management.

It is the process of design that brings these disparate elements into a cohesive whole applicable at the level of the individual, the neighbourhood and community.

## Sustaining people and nature

The purpose of permaculture design is to create living environments that meet – first of all - *the basic needs of people*:

- nutritious food
- dwellings adapted to climate
- community or household sanitation
- access to health services

When people have set up infrastructure to meet their basic needs - infrastructure which is manageable within their knowledge and resource base - they can develop ways to achieve their *higher-order needs*:

- education
- creation of livelihood
- conviviality
- local/ regional economy
- structures for cooperation on matters of mutual benefit
- responsible and accountable local/ regional governance

- planning for the future.

In attempting to meet the needs of people, permaculture designers and community workers think in terms of the whole human settlement – the village, neighbourhood or town and its surroundings – and how the available natural and human resources can be sustainably used.

#### People at the core

The wellbeing of people is the central focus of permaculture design. Design integrates people, their dwellings and the social and natural environments. Care of people and the achievement of their needs in sustainable ways is critical to the survival and wellbeing of natural systems.

#### Resources - physical and non-physical

It is not only physical resources such as buildings, farming systems, tools and technologies, urban infrastructure and materials that is of concern to permaculture designers.

Nonphysical resources – such as the relationships between people in communities, between people and organisations as well as social practices - are also elements of permaculture design.

Non-physical elements of design include:

- local and regional economic systems
- enterprise creation and management
- educational systems
- community organisation
- decision making and governance
- problem solving and conflict resolution
- project management
- planning processes

Wherever possible, permaculture designers *make use of locally-available resources*.

The conservation of resources through planning, careful selection and use, reuse and recycling is critical to permaculture design.

#### Sustainability of habitation the desired outcome

Whatever the level that permaculture design is applied at, the aim is always the creation of the infrastructure for living so that human habitation may continue well into the future.

The way to achieve this is through the development of systems which:

- take care of the earth by reducing pollution and waste and which restore damaged natural systems
- take care of people, their productive systems and the social arrangements which sustain them

That, in essence, is the aim of permaculture.

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