

Sustainable Urban Development and Social Sustainability in the Urban Context

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Abstract: *Social sustainability and sustainable urban developments are major challenges across the world both developed and developing countries. In general there is a conflict between the approach of sustainable development and social sustainability in the urban context. The concept of sustainability brings a key framework for extensive literature on urban design, architecture and planning. Nevertheless there is a considerable overlap between the social dimensions of sustainability and the theories or notions, for instance the 'sustainable societies' that are highlighted in the midst of other aspects: social equity and justice. Such society is widely expected to offer a situation for long-term social relations and activities which are sustainable, inclusive and equitable in a wider perception of the term (environmentally, socially and economically). The method adopted to address this aim involves a content analysis of available academic literature, with focus on the planning sustainable development, built environment, social sustainability, and urban planning fields. The findings demonstrate that in spite of some opposing evidence, many studies have confirmed that there has been displacement of the debate on the term of 'sustainability' from 'ecological and environmental aspects into social and economic aspects'. It is related to how the community feel safe and comfortable living in their own communities, how have they felt of proud of the place where they live. The aim of the paper is to improve our understanding of current theories and practices of planning sustainable development and discuss whether the approach of sustainable development aligns with social sustainability objectives.*

Keywords: Sustainable development, urban planning, social sustainability, community

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'sustainability' has emerged and evolved in several high-level meetings. It has been agreed and widely accepted as a framework concept which is essential in the determination of policies set in the urban development. The idea of sustainability began over 3 decades ago. In line with Williams et al. (2000), this concept delivers a key framework for substantial literature on urban design, architecture and planning. It is also reinforced by Bramley et al. (2009), Davidson et al. (2012), Ghahramanpouri et al. (2013) and Nurul (2015) who propose that an essential apprehension amongst the linked elements of sustainability, which include economic, social, environmental elements, and the extensive understanding of the notion have led to a range of urban forms expressed as 'sustainable'. Unexpectedly, only a small number of scholars have given attention to the notion of social sustainability in built environment fields. The concepts of sustainability started from the human settlement and from there it

has gone further to address issues of housing and neighbourhood development. On the other hand, there is a substantial overlap between the social dimensions of sustainability and the notions, for instance the 'sustainable societies' that are highlighted in the midst of other aspects: social equity and justice. Such society is extensively foreseen to offer a situation for long-term social relations and activities which are sustainable, inclusive and equitable in a wider perception of the term (environmentally, socially and economically). This essay discusses the fundamental principles of social sustainability and delivers an outlining of urban social sustainability. The extensive discussion of sustainability presented here identifies not simply the meaning of social sustainability at the neighbourhood scale; it further highlights the attributes of social sustainability explicitly, which have some bearing on the built environment.

The aim of the paper is to improve our understanding of current concepts and/or ideas of sustainable urban

development and social sustainability and discuss whether the approach of sustainable development aligns with social sustainability objectives at the urban environment. The research methodology is divided into two distinct parts. The first part offers an overview of positioning of social sustainability. This is mainly based on findings from literature and research conducted in sustainability and urban planning disciplines. The second part of this paper presents the findings of the study which expands on a perception of community in the urban context whether social sustainability is harmful or beneficial. The last section summarise the debates on the term of 'sustainability' which has shifted from not only discuss about ecological and environmental but also into social and economic aspects.

2. THE POSITIONING OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are several descriptions of sustainability but well acknowledged and well recognized description is the one put forward by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in their 1987 study commonly known as Bruntland commission report (WCED, 1987, p. 8).

"Sustainable development means meeting 'the needs of the present without compromising with the ability of future generations to meet their own need'.

Whereas Newman expresses sustainability as:

"Sustainability is defined as a global process that also tries to help create an enduring future where environmental and social factors are considered simultaneously with economic factors" (Newman, 2002, p. 1).

The topic of sustainability has become a global issue; it has been discussed by a numerous scholars. However, those discussing the social sustainability can be said to be moderately limited. Interestingly, there are a lot of literature associating the social sustainability with social issues, such as social exclusion, social inclusion, social cohesion, and so forth. Fundamentally, social sustainability is a concept that has broad multi-dimensions, with a key aspect *'what are the social objectives of sustainable development?'* As demonstrated through the work of McKenzie (2004), Vallance et al. (2011), and Woodcraft (2012), there is no consensus on how the aims are described.

Therefore, it is open to a multitude of responses. In spite of the current policy centred on 'social cohesion' and 'sustainable communities', there has been a slightly hypothetical discussion on describing social sustainability. According to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2006, p.12), sustainable communities are described as:

"places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all."

The growth of urban population is continuously increasing and more than half of the world's inhabitants are urban residents. Accordingly, they required affordable housing and it's along the lines of various studies on affordable housing which has been carry out by many scholars and researchers across the world (Whitehead, 2006; Lloyd-Sherlock, 2000; Yates et al., 2007; Yates et al., 2008; Yates and Gabriel, 2006; Wendell, 2005; Burke et al., 2007; Berry, 2006).

As a result, the roles of cities in sustainable development have become more protuberant. As revealed by the United Nations Population Fund (2007), the urban population over the next three decades is projected to increase by more than 70% between 2000 and 2030. Because of the existence of such a phenomenon, sustainable cities have acquired a significant momentum to develop and meet the consequences of the phenomenon.

Several cities, especially in developed countries, have been acknowledged as best practices such as Frankfurt, London, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Melbourne and so forth. Interestingly, since the late 1970s, a 'city renaissance' and the community renewal have been associated in terms of their features to the governments' answer to the escalation of social inequity (Chan & Lee 2008); this is the emphasis on sustainability in the UK (Woodcraft 2012). This importance has been understood by the governments in that it will bring virtuousness in the future for them. It is also strengthened by a study conducted by Yiftachel (1993) which revealed that there was a policy shift by the government in order to address urban social problems.

For instance, the government has allocated the state budget and involved private sectors to work on several major projects for the community. Furthermore, the urban policy has been focused on the local action and community empowerment involving multiple agencies and stakeholders so that sustainable communities, social sustainability, quality of life and welfare of the peoples can be achieved.

3. A NOTION OF URBAN SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: POSITIVE VS NEGATIVE?

The urban character globally has undergone significant changes unlike ever before. The characteristic of buildings and functional patterns of land use and transportation in large-scale urban development planning is still rarely consider the

function of social life. It is obvious that there are distinctions between 'public' and 'private', community life take place exclusively in open spaces, places that are under public control and ownership. Although public space is referred to as a space of contribution, it is also a contested territory between a variety of groups, between public and private, and between the community and regulating authorities. As such, most of scholars agree that an unconditional universal access to public space is almost impossible. This phenomenon is most apparent in newer developments at the urban edge. A new type of public life, non-place society, is taking place in cyberspace at a global scale, but at the same time there have been impacts on public space use in the physical city. But have these urban development's been positive ones?

To obtain an understanding of 'urban social sustainability', table 1 will assist in considering what factors are in the positive or negative dimensions. In the concepts of social inclusion, capital and cohesion, it has been recognized that this notion has negative sides. For instance, it may possibly be seen as negative if people grow to be exclusive and inward-looking in their relationship. When the conceptualization of 'positive vs negative' has been employed in the urban social sustainability, the challenges that are demonstrated while assessing the primary physical elements, as described in Table 1, will arise.

On the other hand, Dempsey (2008) states that the urban social sustainability might only happen once the public space has high security standards, clean and has sufficient vegetation for the community. With a 'high' environmental quality, the urban sustainability process will be easily visible.

Similar to the theory of sustainability, the concept of social sustainability is neither an obvious nor an invariable. It is dependant upon the needs of society and the times. Social sustainability should be considered as a full of life model for the public. Not being fixed at a theory, it could be changed over times (from decade to decade/year to year) in the society, for example, alterations made by the local government service to improve community interaction and social cohesion.

The causative aspects of urban social sustainability have become an essential concern in some countries; it is frequently discussed in national-scale meetings. Other aspects, such as social relations and ecological quality, are more focused on the local and spatial scales. In general, there are two factors underlying the urban social sustainability, Social Equity and Sustainability Community (Bramley & Power 2009). Related to the built environment, both factors are noticeable.

Table 1. Causative factors of urban social sustainability

Non-physical factors	Predominantly physical factors
Education and training	Urbanity
Social justice: inter- and intra-generational	Attractive public realm
Participation and local democracy	Decent housing
Health, quality of life and well-being	Local environmental quality and amenity
Social inclusion (and eradication of social exclusion)	Accessibility (e.g. to local services and facilities/ Employment/green space)
Social capital	Sustainable urban design
Community	Neighbourhood
Safety	Walkable neighbourhood: pedestrian family
Mixed tenure	
Fair distribution of income	
Social cohesion	
Community cohesion (i.e. cohesion between and among different groups)	
Social networks	
Social interaction	
Sense of community and belonging	
Residential stability (vs turnover)	
Active community organizations	
Cultural traditions	

source: Dempsey et. al (2011)

3.1. Social equity

According to Chan and Lee (2008), the theory of social equity has the basics in equality of circumstance, fairness in the delivery of capitals or wealth, distributive justice and social justice. This notion has been reinforced through a study conducted by Uzzell et al. (2002), which suggests that the principles of sustainable development have been clear, in that the concept of social equity reflects the value of social justice for the future generation.

Conversely, social equity is closely related to environmentally friendly and social exclusion in the urban setting (Wheeler 2004). In order to achieve an equitable society, each individual is encouraged to actively participate in the community in the fields of social, economic and political. Thus, within the society, there will be no 'exclusionary' or intolerant practices as the individuals can act together and socialise each other. In measuring social equity, people will normally measure the ease of accessibility that is provided to the public (Preston & Rajé 2007). In the built environment context, social equity is one of sensitive issues, since people frequently find unfair conditions. For example, unpleasant services and facilities which are provided to the community, lack of access for pedestrians and bicycles, public transport service which does not accommodate the rural area, the distance between the

public open spaces and public transport (Preston & Rajé 2007)

The cases mentioned before are directly related to the built environment. As Winston (2000) stated, when the government has failed to provide ease of access to the public, it will negatively affect the other social issues, which will have a domino effect. In this case, it becomes a challenge for planners in planning for an area or urban that supports the sustainable development aspects (Valdes-Vasquez & Klotz 2013), especially social sustainability. The planners should also pay attention to the way to plan ease of access to public transport, bicycles, and pedestrians, so that the issue of social equity that recently appears will decrease by itself (Wheeler 2004).

3.2. Sustainability of community

According to Uzzell (2002), numerous theories and policies have claimed that social inclusion and cohesion are aspects that have contributed towards the creation of resilient and fair society. This has been closely related to the support of social interaction and networking between all citizens, as well as the prevailing social order in the society (Wheeler 2004). A sustainable community refers to the ability of people that is economically, environmentally, and socially healthy and resilient to sustain at an adequate level.

In the views of Magis (2010) and Hamiduddin (2015), there are several elements that influence the success or failure of the sustainability of the community, such as the way the social interactions existing amongst members of the society, safe and secure feeling in the society, the level of trust in the community, the level of community participation in formal and informal activities, and the positive sense and pride as members of the community. These factors are closely related to people's life. As such, it is obvious that the sustainability of a community is closely intertwined with social life aspects. Therefore, with the aim of exploring social life at the neighbourhood level, there are four elements of community sustainability, namely:

3.2.1. Community involvement in the groups

Involvement in the activities of the community is described as the process of engaging in discussions and cooperations with members of the society. This is an element of social sustainability, associated with social network incorporation and social coherence (Magis 2010). Each individual may have different sorts of social networks owned both within and outside the society itself. This means that the participation is done by each individual depending on their interests.

Surprisingly, there are some people who have absolutely no interest to participate in the community activities (House et al. 1982). However, it is obvious

that participation in the society contributes positively to the sustainability of the community (Manzo & Perkins 2006). Those who are not directly involved in the community will get the impact both negative and positive as humans are essentially social beings.

3.2.2. Social interaction amongst the society

As stated by Calder and Beckie (2013), social interaction is a means for individuals to dialogue and take action with each other in different structures of the social order. Social relations and social networks are reliably defined as vital characteristics of social capital (Almahmoud & Doloi 2015). Thus, social capital has a close relationship to and has a direct impact on social cohesion (Selman 2001). Selman also argued that when a community has a massive and strong social capital, people will have willingness to collaborate with each other to stay alive and prosper much better. This will support the sustainable communities. However, Dempsey et al. (2011) and Dillard et al. (2008) pointed out that social capital and social cohesion could not be completely progressive models.

3.2.3. Security and safety

The perceived safety and security of a community are a vital aspect of social sustainability (Manzi 2010). Being free from the threat of crime and disorder in a society is intimately associated with the dimensions of community sustainability. The benefit of a safe place in the community is people can easily make social interactions with other individuals and actively participate in communal activities. Such a view is supported by the work of Bellair (1997) and Talen (1999) who found that there are links between built environment and safety in the planning process. Take an example, enhancing the sense of security and comfort when interacting with each other can be done by creating an active frontage, such as windows which have a view over the streets (Dempsey 2008). On the contrary, the built environment in a poor condition and maintenance will contribute negatively to the sense of security and comfort in the communal.

3.2.4. Pride / sense of the place and community

It has been discussed extensively that activities, senses and physical settings are closely interconnected (Thompson & Kent 2014). It is also stated by Walljasper et al. (2007) in a book on placemaking; they argued that wherever people live, they have a sense of pride to the place and the surrounding communities, especially those who live in a good physical environment and have sufficient facilities (Kemp-Benedict et al. 2010). Individuals living in places that are clean and have adequate amenities in the surroundings will have pride or a positive sense of their place (McMillan & Chavis 1986). This is closely interrelated to the built environment and quality of the places. Thus, people who live in a decent physical

setting will be more proactive in social interactions and participate in community activities (Marinetti 2003). This supports the social sustainability of the community.

4. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that there has been displacement of the debate about the term 'sustainability'. It has shifted from 'ecological and environmental aspects into social and economic aspects' (Colantonio & Dixon 2009). Thus, issues related to social sustainability have emerged as an interesting theme to be examined more deeply. This essay has provided an overview of social sustainability in the urban context by reviewing concepts and definitions related to the concept of sustainability. Factors of social sustainability are closely related to the built environment created. This is a challenge for planners, particularly with regard to the way they can respond to and plan a place that supports the sustainability of the community. As such, the residents will actively participate in the community activities and social interactions amongst inhabitants. Moreover, with the community involvement, they feel safe and comfortable living in their own communities; they are also proud of the place where they live. To make certain that social sustainability does not arise at the expense of economic and environmental sustainability, a sense of balance among the diverse dimensions of sustainability is needed. As such, sustainability in the community can be achieved.

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