

Chapter 9

Planning Urban Futures With Reference to Sustainable Cities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is a review of scholarly works on planning for urban futures with special reference to sustainable cities. The chapter aims to produce an update of the challenges and current perspectives on urban planning, sustainability and development across the globe. As informed by research from the academic and scientific communities, the review provides the prospective directions and trends for securing a sustainable urban future. In the sustainable cities discourse, recent intellectual inquiry focused on the conceptualization and knowledge production to create sustainable cities. Though the scope of the review may not be exhaustive, the purpose is to articulate the current progress in the research front concerning concepts and definitions on sustainable cities, planning and methods for urban sustainability development and assessment. The ultimate goal is to provide local authorities, practitioners and/or city governments with some perspective and guidance in working towards urban sustainability in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, sustainability research has grown significantly with the surge of academic publications about Sustainability Science as a new field of research and practice that has emerged on a global scale (Shahadu, 2016; Bettencourt & Kaur, 2011; Kates, 2011; Kates, Clark, Corell, & Hall, 2001). Since the 1980s, the new science has been viewed to require more vigorous academic attention as a

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7302-9.ch009

distinct discipline on sustainability (Shahadu, 2016). Different from the paradigm of sustainable development (SD), 'sustainability' has been taken as a planning concept with its beginnings in ecological thinking and economics and now widely applied to studies in urban development (Adinyira, Oteng-Seifah, & Adjei-Kumi, 2007). There are various conceptualizations and diverse interpretations of 'sustainability' as a concept, paradigm or buzzword, as others put it. Some use 'sustainability' interchangeably to mean sustainable development but in theory, they are different.

Historically, sustainable development has been the subject of many debates since it emerged and came into use in policy circles more than three decades ago and labeled either as an 'oxymoron', a contradiction of terms, or just another jargon deemed to be overworked, if not overexposed (Robertson, 2014; Du Pisani, 2006; Redclift, 2005; Beekerman, 1994; Daly, 1990; WCED, 1987). Regardless of what the critics say about sustainable development, it is contested yet recognized worldwide as a driving force in development discourses, if not in the broader policy arena. Comparatively, the concept of sustainability as a normative notion suggests how humans should act towards nature and be responsible towards one another at the present as well as the future generations (Baumgartner & Quaas, 2010). Others stressed the meaning of sustainability *per se* varies according to context and perspective (Brown, 1987; Shearman, 1990). In the past, environmental problems such as deforestation, salinization and loss of soil fertility that occurred as early as the ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman civilizations are also among the pressing environmental issues that beset us in the past and current century (du Pisani, 2006). Historian du Pisani (2006) pointed out that the term 'sustainability' was first used in German Forestry circles by Hans Carl von Carlowitz in 1713 to call for a balance of harvesting old trees and have enough young trees to replace them. Here, the purpose is not to establish a precise, or universal definition of the term 'sustainability' as there are multiple versions and differentiated meanings, as informed by varied research agenda. Two widely articulated views of sustainability pertain to a) the triple bottom line or three pillars based on environmental, economic and social dimensions; and b) the need to maintain equity between current and future generations (Mori & Christodoulou, 2012; Shahadu, 2016; Turvey, 2017). In understanding sustainability as it reflects itself in an urban context, scholars believe that humanity has the ability to build a sustainable world through the practice of urban sustainability (Smith, 2015; Glaeser, 2011; Owen, 2010). While there exists a broad literature on 'sustainability', the academic focus on the theory and practice of urban sustainability that concerns 'sustainable cities', have yet to gain robust attention from the community of intellectual and scientific scholars to address the challenges of the concepts and processes in sustainable urban development.

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