

Chapter 2

Sustainable Urbanism Revisited: A Holistic Framework Based on Tradition and Contemporary Orientations

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ABSTRACT

At a time of uncontrolled globalization in which serious environmental problems are threatening cities and their inhabitants, as cultural integrity is constantly under attack and many cities lack socially inclusive and responsive environments, there is an urgent need for a radical shift towards a holistic strategy for sustainable urbanism combining ecological sustainability and socio-cultural sustainability. This calls for sensitivity to the traditional urbanism and impact of global ideas, practices, and technologies on local social and cultural practices. In line with these, this chapter aims to establish an environmentally sound and human friendly framework for sustainable urbanism. In this context, the study firstly provides a conceptual understanding of sustainable urbanism and a critical review of its philosophical and practical framework; secondly, it provides an assessment of contemporary approaches to sustainable urbanism; thirdly, the chapter analyses the traditional Turkish (Ottoman) city which provides valuable clues for sustainable development, and discusses possible research directions that could help promote the concept of sustainable urbanism.

INTRODUCTION

Changes that have taken place in the world over the past twenty years, including ecological disturbances and radical changes in traditional settlements have produced cities that are not just

chaotic and monotonous in appearance, but have serious environmental problems threatening their inhabitants. Sustainable urbanism, on that ground, appears as a sound framework that draws attention to the immense opportunity to redesign the built environment in a manner that supports a higher quality of life and human health. In this context, when sustainable urbanism is characterised, what

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is usually addressed as the main concern is natural environment, and hence ecological sustainability, a condition that could be explained with the climate change, the inevitable environmental crisis. Today's development practices consume enormous amounts of land and natural resources, damage ecosystems, produce a wide variety of pollutants and toxic chemicals, create ever-growing distances and inequities between groups of people, fuel global warming, and undermine local community and social values, economies, and quality of life. These incremental changes imply a more critical state in cities of traditional societies where transformations in the urban level are still visible.

What is questioned in this chapter is that, given our knowledge that environmental sustainability is a crucial need, are the contemporary approaches adequate for all settings? At a time of uncontrolled globalization in which sense of place, history and cultural distinctiveness is constantly under attack and many cities lack socially inclusive and responsive environments, do these approaches also integrate social-cultural dimensions? These call for a new understanding of traditional settlements as they represent good uses of local environmental and social values in their times.

The chapter first provides a theoretical underpinning of sustainable urbanism and a critical review of its philosophical and practical framework; second, assessing contemporary approaches to sustainable urbanism and analysing the traditional Turkish (Ottoman) City, proposes a holistic framework for sustainable urbanism that integrates environmental considerations with social-cultural sustainability.

BACKGROUND: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE URBANISM

The concept of "sustainability" in its modern sense emerged in the early 1970s in response to

a dramatic growth in understanding that modern development practices were leading to worldwide environmental and social crises. During the seventies and eighties, the word "sustainability" used to be connected with the quotation from the Brundtland Report "development which meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to achieve their own needs and aspirations" (WCED, 1987). Over the decades, that definition has attracted a lot of discussions. Adams (1990) has criticized the Brundtland Commission's approach for being too accommodating to the interests of the industrialized nations and for not questioning the desirability of continued economic growth. Hence, the notion later developed to describe the goal of integrating concerns and analyses that join economic development and ecological health (Eid, 2003). Hereafter, the notion of endurance and continuity was thought to be the domain of natural science that studied environmental measures to ensure that controlled growth meant that we use the earth in a way that endowed the same rights for future generations. Falling beyond the realm of natural science, the city, the community and their concerns were treated as separate entities, rather than being incorporated into the sustainability context (Haughton & Hunter, 1994; Berg, Magilavy & Zuckerman, 1990). What is more, most of the literature viewed the city and urban living as detrimental to the natural environment and hence a challenge to sustainable development. Among these, the influential book *Design with Nature* by Scottish landscape architect Ian McHarg (1969) was the most influential¹. On the other hand, since the city is an organic and dynamic entity and may take many different forms and meanings at different time intervals, we are bound to take the "time" factor into account. Sustainability, then, can be regarded as a perspective or paradigm in which we consider the three dimensions of society, economy and environment together, extending the fourth dimension of time".

Sustainable urbanism grows out of three late 20th Century reform movements that have tran-

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