

Forum: Special Conference on Sustainable Cities

Issue: Social urban planning: empowerment through community development

Student Officer: Joanna Sakkadas

Position: President

INTRODUCTION

With an ever growing population, social urban planning has become a necessity when it comes to creating and maintaining sustainable environments and communities. Social urban planning provides a framework, in which social workers and community organizers can come together and work on developing plans and programs for their communities. It also allows for them to manage their resources in an efficient and sustainable way.

By empowering societies through community development, we can create groups of people, which feel that they have a say in managing more efficiently their land and resources. This is an issue that should be tackled in all countries, because it is a great step towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The social aspect of this topic is also very important to look at. Planning out a socially acceptable city would be most beneficial in the short as well as in the long run. Everyone should feel socially accepted within his/her community, irrespective of his/her background or religion. Therefore, it is necessary that cities should meet all people's needs. Through social urban planning, governments can ensure that no one feels left out and hence a more productive and sustainable environment can be established.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Urban planning

The term "urban planning" refers to the layout and use of a particular urban environment optimizing its physical form, economic functions, and social impact, as well as organizing the different activities and events that take place there.

Community Development

A process by which a community comes together to solve a common problem it faces. It is often done through self-determination, empowerment, and collective action.

Grassroots

The grassroots of a community are the ordinary people who organize themselves and support economic or political change. One of their goals is persuading influential people to change their and other people's votes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Grassroots

Community is often developing at grassroots level. The process often used involves becoming more responsible and careful as a single community, developing healthier lifestyle options, empowering itself, implementing measures to reduce poverty and suffering, creating employment and economic opportunities, and achieving social, economic, cultural and environmental goals. Among the strategies are obtaining donations and organising large demonstrations to capture the attention to its aims. Community development is a set of values and policies that results into greater mutual benefits and a shared responsibility amongst community members with the aim to improve their quality of life.

Empowering community development will not only help society progress but also boost its morale, which could thus lead to increased productivity rates and a more sustainable environment. Grassroots methods have been effective in the past and, as a non-violent form of organization, they get their message across just as well.

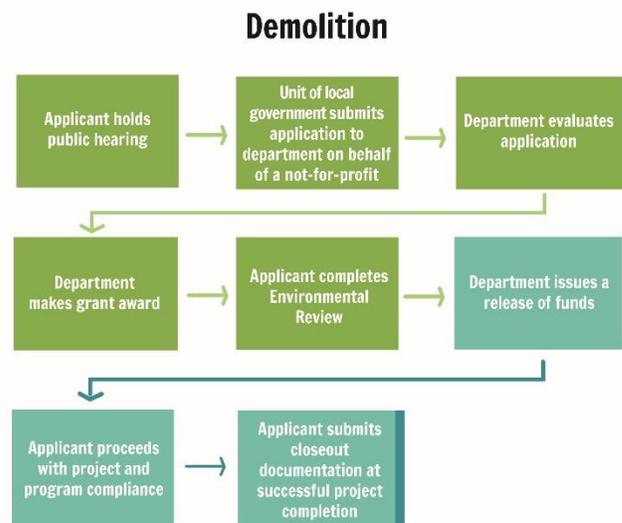
However, grassroots communities often face many difficulties, especially on a smaller scale. Such difficulties include either not having enough supporters or having ones that are often hard to get in touch with due to the fact that some of them are located abroad. Furthermore, it is often difficult to find people with the right set of skills to fill specific positions, such as persons with a political background willing to join the movement. Yet, another difficulty is the lack of sufficient funding to make any significant headway for achieving their aims. This difficulty may often stop them dead in their tracks because they cannot go further and sometimes this means the end of the movement. Moreover, they have, received criticism when it comes to the fact that they have not a prominent leadership. It is argued that these horizontal movements are far less effective than ones under a recognizable leadership and thus they are deemed to be weak and moribund.

Grassroots movements are more often political and therefore they have a strong political history. The American civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s is a prime example of how a grassroots movement can make a great political change. With lead activists, such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks, they made great political change not only in America, but also worldwide. Another such movement making a political change was the German peace movement of the 1980s. It used mainly Green parties as a means of promoting peace, while many other European countries followed in its footsteps after seeing its success.

Community development

In the past, community development has mainly consisted in obtaining funding so as to be able to go on with its plans. Ever since Oxford published the Community Development Journal in 1966, there has been a greater attention to research and see how we can progress as a community and society through community development. It has proven to be effective in practice leading to a more efficient and sustainable community environment. There have been many community development organizations that have been set up with the main aim to improve community life, they have been growing in popularity and are always looking for more community workers every day.¹

Empowering community development provides communities with many benefits. One such benefit is a more inclusive environment, which leads to better working conditions and a boosted morale among their members. Community development helps communities build public agencies and encourages people to work together towards a common goal. Being able to change the relations between ordinary working people and people in power is another benefit of community development. It also further improves relationships between countries by fostering mutual aid. Another common result of community development is social justice.



MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

¹ Image 1: “Community Development Block Grant - Demolition.” Community Development Block Grant - Demolition | Department of Economic Development, <https://ded.mo.gov/programs/cdbg/demolition>.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

UNFPA works with partners in government, the United Nations system and civil society to better sustainability and conditions in urban areas and communities. They do this by ensuring access to essential services, mainly healthcare. Recognizing the relation between urbanization and economic growth they have helped in the past and are still helping with urban planning.

Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)

A global network involving over 1,750 local and regional governments that aims at sustainable urban development. They work in more than 100 countries, influence policies and take action towards low emission, nature based, resilient, equitable, and circular development. They achieve this through peer exchange, strong partnerships, and building capacity to create systematic change towards urban sustainability.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

This United Nation organization is a global development network aiming at change and uniting countries to gather resources, experience, and knowledge to build a better future. Its services include providing quality advice, training, and grants in order to support countries in need and the less economically developed countries (LEDCs). They further promote cooperation subserving technical and financial advancements.

Canada

Canada is one of the leading countries when it comes to social urban planning, since nearly all of its provinces have a council dedicated to it. They have many sustainable cities due to their urban planning. More specifically, Canada has a Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS) that has helped the country organize and prioritize its goals regarding sustainability. One of its main aims was to preserve as many wildlife areas as possible planning carefully the country's sustainable urban fabric.

United States of America (USA)

Much like Canada, the USA also has gone through a lot of social urban planning. They have also set up various organizations, such as the United States Green Building

Council (USGBC). In addition, they have had a lot of various communities pushing for social urban planning. These communities are often minorities wishing to better their standard of living and integrate into societal life.

United Kingdom (UK)

The UK, although is more focused on other issues, has done its best to keep on top of this problem. They have set up many organizations and a lot of people do volunteer as community developers. Most big cities have gone through social urban planning due to the different cultures coexisting there. In 2015, the UK had a grassroots aid movement during the height of the refugee crisis. Many people signed up, although they had no prior non-governmental organization (NGO) experience. This grassroots movement sent a lot of people to refugee camps in Dunkirk, Calais, the Balkans, North Macedonia, and the Greek islands in order to provide as much aid as possible.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1997	The state of Maryland enacts the “Smart Growth” and Neighborhood Conservation.
1998	The United States Green Building Council (USGBC) introduces the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification system.
2011	Establishment of the United Nations Environment Program: Cities —investing in energy and resource efficiency.
2015	The United Nations adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the goal for Sustainable Cities and Communities.

18 October 2016	The UN held a conference in the General Assembly on housing and urban development.
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RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Provisional Agenda: World Urban Forum: Second Session, Barcelona, 13-17 September 2004, HSP/WUF/2/1

During this conference, they discussed urbanization and its impact on the world. They attempted to come up with a way to optimize it.

Draft Resolution: New Urban Agenda: Submitted by the President of the Conference, Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, 18 October 2016, A/CONF.226/L.1

During this conference held in the General Assembly, they adopted the New Urban Agenda that aimed at optimizing urban development.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals have also been put in place. Specifically, Goal 11 aims for sustainable cities and communities. These goals are meant to be achieved globally and many countries are already making great headway towards achieving them.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

Many countries have tried and will continue trying to tackle this issue. A lot of them have been planning out the future of their cities through the perspective of sustainability. For example, Canada has created multiple councils within its provinces and territories with the sole purpose of social urban planning.

The UN has also created NGOs, such as the UNFPA and the UNDP, that aim to promote community development and urban planning. These organizations have made great efforts and progress by granting access to essential services, such as decent

healthcare, clean water and food. They have done this by pointing out their common goals and encouraging people to achieve them by working together.

Moreover, some people have taken it upon themselves to get their message heard through grassroots means, without a push from an NGO or their government. These people recognize the importance of social urban planning and accept the responsibility to make the necessary changes in their communities. In their effort to implement these changes, they get into contact with influential people. Having power in numbers is to their advantage. By gathering a great number of people, all with the same goal, they put pressure on governments to listen to them.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Community development is the key to solving major social problems. By allowing the people to come together, the social issues are much better tackled. In order for communities to carry out their necessary tasks, funding is needed; another essential precondition is the vital social space for discussing the present and future issues of the community. Encouraging people to attend certain meetings and get essentially involved is instrumental in empowering community development.

In addition, policies need to be changed in order for communities to make any substantial progress. Active participation of the people in societal proceedings is a very important factor in achieving their common goals. This means that policy makers will have to occasionally step back and allow the community to decide its future plans.

Raising awareness among the community is another important factor, which facilitates problem-solving. Local governments need to encourage people to actively participate in civic life.

Furthermore, the planning of a city has to be sustainable. People that could come to live in it in the future, e.g., immigrants, will also have to be taken into account. The city will have to be able to cater for every person choosing to settle in it regardless of his/her ethnicity or religion. These are the long term solutions that community members have to think about.

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