Urban social sustainability: North - South perspectives

Dr Andrea Colantonio and Prof. Tim Dixon
Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD)

UN-Habitat 4th World Urban Forum, 3-6 November 2008, Nanjing, China
Background

This presentation draws upon our research entitled ‘Measuring Social Sustainability: Best Practices From Urban Renewal in the EU’

The research is funded by the European Investment Bank University Research Sponsorship (EIBURS) Programme

http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/be/oisd/sustainable_communities/
Urban Social Sustainability

Our understanding of social sustainability is still fuzzy and limited by theoretical and methodological constraints stemming from its context and disciplinary-dependent definitions and measurements.
### Theoretical Research Approaches to Social Sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Examples of main authors</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Capital**
| **Equity and Human Rights**
  (e.g. poverty studies and unequal development) | Sen (1985, 1992), Sachs (2001)            | Since late 1980s  |
| **Institutional Theory and Governance**
  (e.g. participation and stakeholder analysis) | Chambers (1992), Healey (1992)            | Since early 1990s |
| **Business and Corporate studies**
  (e.g. Triple Bottom Line, Corporate Social Responsibility) | Elkington (1994)                          | Since mid 1990s   |
| **Behavioural and Welfare Economics**
  (Capabilities, well-being, health and happiness perspectives) | Nussbaum (1995) and Sen (1993), Layard (2005) | Since late 1990s  |
Research and Policy linkages

**Research**
- Capital approach
- Institutional theory, Equity & Governance
- Well Being and Quality of Life

**Policy**
- Social Capital promotion
- Participation & Empowerment
- City Liveability

**A few examples**
- World Bank’s Social Capital Implementation Framework (e.g. Albania, Philippines, Thailand, Sierra Leone etc.), 1990s-2000s
- UK Government’s neighborhood renewal, community health and educational achievement programs, 2000s
- UN Agenda 21, 1990s-2000s (e.g. Curitiba etc.)
- Capacity Building, NGOs, 1990s-2000s (e.g. Latin America and Africa etc.)
- Urban regeneration projects (e.g. Rotterdam, Barcelona, Cardiff, etc.), 2000s

*These approaches complement and/or include traditional policies focused on jobs creation, education, poverty alleviation, migration etc.*
## Urban Social Sustainability Themes and Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Southern Cities</th>
<th>Northern Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Hard’ Themes</td>
<td>‘Soft’ Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic needs, including Housing</td>
<td>Demographic change (aging and international migration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>Sense of safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>Social mixing and cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National migration</td>
<td>Social Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Well being, Happiness and Quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of Northern cities*

**Turin, Italy**
- Urban Regeneration
- Competiveness
- Social Mixing and international migration
- Participation

**Rotterdam, Holland**
- Social Mixing and Gentrification
- Image
- Safety
- City-liveability and well being

* The lists are not exhaustive
Urban Social Sustainability Themes and Discourses

Examples of Southern cities*

**Havana, Cuba**
- Economic opening up and FDI
- Urban Infrastructure
- Housing
- Social impact of tourism

**Mexico City, Mexico**
- Slumps and basic needs
- Housing
- Poverty
- Crime
- National Migration

* The lists are not exhaustive
Social sustainability policy

Experimental (e.g. social mixing)

Local (e.g. sustainable communities)

Fragmented (e.g. multiple stakeholders at different levels in the sustainability arena)

People or Place-based? (e.g. measurement issues)
Directions in social sustainability research and policy

• Integration and comprehensiveness of themes and measurements in sustainability assessment research

• Southern and Northern cities and city-regions’ development paths: lessons to be learned from a social sustainability perspectives

• Impacts of the current economic outlook on social sustainability research and policy?
Contacts

Dr Andrea Colantonio and Prof. Tim Dixon
email: acolantonio@brookes.ac.uk

Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD)
Oxford Brookes University
United Kingdom