

FINDING AN APT STRATEGY FOR (WHAT WE CURRENTLY BELIEVE IS) SUSTAINABLE URBAN LAND USE AND AREA DEVELOPMENT

Tom KAUKO

Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology - NTNU, Trondheim, NO-7091, Norway.

Abstract. The long-term viability and management success of local economic development is a vital precondition for embarking on sustainable urban land use and area development paths. This paper examines two interlinked goals within this normative discourse: innovativeness and social cohesion. Based on literature and documentation of best practice, it is argued that a mature market for private investment provides the most viable framework for sustainability. While this perspective works better for developed countries, opportunities arise also for the lesser developed regions when technology, institutions and behaviours develop incrementally in response to successful trial and error corrections of policies implemented.

Key words: Urban sustainability, land use, area development.

1. Introduction

It is difficult to deny the effect of the sustainable development paradigm – basically this is about a sensible use of finite resources – when looking back on the last 40 or so years¹. How would the world look without a paradigm preoccupied with pollution control, energy saving or resource saving? Would we be flying cheerfully outside the balconies on James Bond type of one person helicopters? Would we have colonies on the Moon? In such a world we might not remember what the proverbial ‘saving for a rainy day’ means. We probably would not have heard of ecological footprints, social cohesion, or reinvesting wisely either. Indeed, the future is yet uncertain, and we must take into consideration the worst case

scenarios when interpolating from the current situation marred by crises after crises, caused by irreversible decisions being made by blatantly ignorant and arrogant actors. On the other hand, we have some ideas of best case scenarios too, and the issue now becomes that of finding the most efficient paths towards reaching such situations by industrial ecologic strategies such as pollution reduction, clean tech, NGOs, finding untapped markets in relation to poor consumers and so forth (see e.g. Young and Dhanda, 2013).

This ostensibly will be conditional upon fundamental changes in attitudes, demand and supply structures, markets, regulative measures and policy initiatives, and most certainly, directions

taken by technological progress (e.g. Joss, 2011). The aim is relatively straightforward: the sustainable development discourse focuses, in one way or another, on the need to improve the usage of Earth's resources – natural, material and human alike. The means to achieve this goal are however less straightforward: we need sustainably legitimate and financially sound behavioural models on all levels, ranging from the individual consumer and citizen, and the small firm, via local community and governance interests, to corporate strategies and government agendas. From a business point of view, four sets of drivers can here be identified as adding or creating a sustainable value for the enterprise: (1) pollution, material consumption and waste; (2) civil society and transparency; (3) clean-tech (e.g. making solar and wind energy process more competitive; and (4) pollution and poverty. Huge opportunities to create sustainable value lies in the unexploited potential which exists all over the world (particularly in undeveloped countries). Organisations should therefore select the best strategy of the four options above in order to achieve their particular sustainable goals. Sustainability in business can even [sic] be seen as the next Industrial Revolution. This despite sustainability still being a vague concept with several connotations (Young and Dhanda, 2013, pp. 138-161).

When we identify a global responsibility to improve this state of affairs, a more particular set of questions arise. Can sustainable development legislation and policies designed for North American or European levels be applied for the circumstances of emerging economies and developing countries? To what extent is it reasonable to expect transfer of pragmatic ideas involving economic,

environmental, social or cultural sustainability criteria? This paper looks at how urban sustainability goals, in particular with respect to social *cohesion* and (mainly economic) *innovativeness* of land use and area development decisions, can be approached in various institutional settings ranging from the Western via the post-socialist to third world contexts. The reason these two goals are picked for scrutiny is that immediate effects of physical development often do have social and economic knock-on effects on other areas of life, and in this picture both inequality and backwardness remain recurring problems to combat. The causalities how these two problems are interlinked in urban economic theory are also noteworthy: in a macro sense, economic recession indirectly tends to accentuate social inequality; in a micro sense (and also indirectly), social problems are likely to be negatively capitalized in nearby property prices and area attractiveness potential.

This contribution represents an explorative phase of a broader research undertaking, where propositions are fleshed out in both theoretical and policy oriented domains. When dealing with such a multifaceted context as this, the definitions become crucial in order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Here the definition is about areas of varying size rather than individual residences, offices or plots. The areas comprise both new developments and existing neighbourhoods subject to revitalization. The definition of the sustainability concept in turn relates to the commonplace partitioning onto environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions, although these four dimensions are often overlapping and thereby producing synthetic categories

such as 'functionality'. The research problem here concerns sustainability assessment of land use and locations for property development, in particular where housing areas, office parks and urban regeneration areas are considered. This also means a normative (albeit pragmatic and realistic) stance for this study; thus, a number of criteria of sustainability will be argued for (together with their counterarguments) and operationalized into an empirically testable framework. The empirically testable framework is split into three city- and country-specific contexts: namely, for developed (or Western), post-socialist and low developed (i.e. developing) cases, respectively.

The study is based on various literatures (urban sustainability, sustainable real estate, in particular) as well as anecdotal evidence. For the latter sources, the anecdotes are of two types: one, the presented uncritical opinions of the sustainability actors themselves, even if such are often to be dismissed as mere 'window-dressing' – it is our task as researchers to filter this information; two, reports of policy-oriented studies carried out by supranational bodies who, while arguably not being completely objective either, at least employ commonly accepted research methods.

2. Social and economic aspects of urban sustainability

A scan of the literature shows that, while the concept of sustainability might have been used already in the 1960s, the first serious academic debates about its definitions emerged in the 1980s. For example, Shanmugaratnam (1990) lamented that the concept of sustainable development has multiple meanings, is in the danger of becoming overused and suffers from a too narrow

definition of economic accounting systems. Despite improvements still some of this critique remains today (cf. Støa, 2009; Manzi *et al.*, 2010a,b; Colantonio and Dixon, 2011; Talen, 2011; Young and Dhanda, 2013)². Thus most of the issues at stake in the sustainability debate can hardly be considered completely recent phenomena. Not even the social dimension is new even if it is the least theorized aspect of the paradigm. Namely, already nearly two decades ago thinkers such as Luper-Foy (1995) treated sustainability as an issue of intergenerational justice – "justice as fairness" towards the next generation of consumers; he also suggested that a reduction in population levels is necessary to reach sustainability (see also Varvarigos and Zacharia, 2011).

Furthermore, an alternative perspective exists. Zuideau (2006) asks whether taking the spatial dimension – and not only the intergenerational one as is usual – into account changes the challenges of reaching equity and efficiency related to sustainable development goals. Zuideau points out the problem that the spatial distribution of sustainability hitherto has been a neglected aspect of sustainability as the emphasis has been more on how different actors cause effects in one particular territory and the consequences this has. According to Zuideau the problem for successful bottom up management of cities and regions is the cooperation across adjacent territories. Here especially vital is the cooperation among private sector actors in adjacent or adjoining municipalities.

For the reason of space constraints, only two effects are focused on here (because

of reasons explained in the introductory section). To focus on social cohesion and innovativeness only is also justified in so far as we recognised a relative void in the literature – because the environmental aspect still dominates both general and more specific discourses on sustainability.

2.1. *Social cohesion in the neighbourhood or city*

Apparently, when resource scarcity causes conflicts among values and goals, the times are difficult for planning practice. Challenges are so serious that we are stretched to go far beyond our comfort zones. Social problems in relation to inequality and use of resources can only be solved when we are open to new possibilities. We must not forget that it is community values that are at stake when the times are strongly encouraging narrow minded individualistic thinking. This is not only about the poorest on the globe, but it is also challenging to sort the problems of those who once were part of a western middle-class, but who subsequently have fallen from there due to unemployment, mortgage default or other personal crisis. Obviously, the key question is as to whose responsibilities these are: the politicians', the NGOs' or the private sector's? It is furthermore to observe that the definition of social sustainability is far broader than the definition of social cohesion – one of the two issues under scrutiny in this study. In what follows, the term 'social sustainability' is referred to only in order to put the cohesion debate into a wider context.

Social sustainability has been defined by Manzi *et al.* (2010a,b) in terms of social equity, access to resources, participation, social capital, human rights and exclusion. The key question

posed by Manzi and colleagues (2010b) concerns the competence of governments to steer partnerships and networks: are they well placed to incorporate a wider range of stakeholders in the delivery of urban processes (pp. 10-15)? According to Manzi *et al.* (2010b, p. 17), sustainable communities are defined by eight sectors – the *Egan Wheel model*: governance, transport and connectivity, services, environment, equity, economy, housing and the built environment, and social and cultural factors (cf. Allen and Lloyd-Jones, 2010). Moreover, while sustainability agendas [sic] neglect the political dimensions, evidence tells us that social sustainability levels are highest in egalitarian societies (p. 22). Manzi and colleagues (2010b) maintain that, despite conceptual flaws and practical difficulties, social sustainability is an important guiding principle for direction of policies and environment; furthermore, it is inseparable from environmental and economic dimensions. The overall conclusion of Manzi and colleagues (2010a) is that social sustainability requires investment and not only plans. In other words, economic innovativeness is likely to deliver social cohesion for the same territory and plausibly adjacent territories.

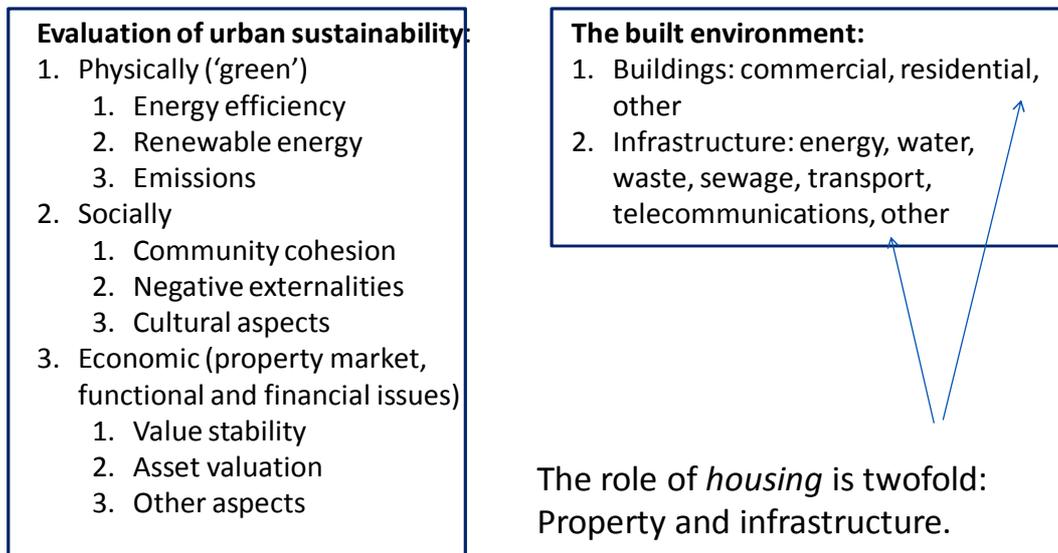
Related to this understanding, the concept *buzz* from modern economic geography is often brought into this discourse. It refers to a spontaneous organization of cultural and leisure opportunities in order to provide an attractive urban milieu, and based on that strength, economic and population growth (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004). This can happen only in places where the market is relatively free to mould the urban structure. Furthermore, this concept is

defined through a static setting, where the abovementioned virtues do not disappear or change shape easily. Thus, a place that is not only defined in terms of *face to face* contacts between talented people – another concept than often is discussed as a precondition of economic innovation³ – but also in terms of more permanent characteristics of the cityscape.

2.2. *Innovativeness of the region*

The key to understanding the economic sustainability concept is to realise how incentives are set up to stimulate work, saving and reinvestment. Bryson and Lombardi (2009) purport that maximising short-term profits in residential development projects in cities leads to unsustainable development in the long run. Conversely, if normal profits are reaped and the remaining margins (i.e. the extra profits) are reinvested wisely in infrastructure the

longevity of the project – an important precondition for sustainability – can be enhanced. For example, the project developer invests in bus stops, in more green features of the buildings and other area, or even in some innovations that improve the social and environmental sustainability of the dwellings and residential areas (see Fig. 1). How to get private developers interested in financing non economic elements, however, will not be easy, as long-term economic strategies are required from them. This also requires good governance and designing apt institutions to direct the investments on the right track. In other words: economic sustainability must come before the social aspects discussed above and the more standardised or established environmental aspects. Thus it can be argued that, only after economic solidity is achieved, investment in social cohesion is affordable.



The role of *housing* is twofold:
Property and infrastructure.

Economic sustainability or New business culture:
The profit from 3. is reinvested into 1. & 2.

Fig. 1. Definition of urban sustainability strategy in this study and the double role of housing

When looking at the business case for sustainability, there are roles for both consumers and corporations. For the former group of actors, the role of business can be defined in relation to sustainable consumption in three ways: (1) innovation in terms of eco-efficiency, product innovation and design, product and supply, chain management and business model innovation; (2) influencing choice; and (3) editing choice (i.e. removing unsustainable products and services). To give an example of a consumption pattern that involve all three, conversion of home to solar heating is likely to require a costly retrofit, but if one lives long enough, one saves energy costs, which in turn leads to a value increase (Young and Dhanda, 2013, pp. 178-192).

The role of the corporation in turn can be defined through two issues: whether the business model is considered sustainable or unsustainable; and whether its impact on the environment is high or low. On the other hand one must be sensitive to how the notion of Corporate social responsibility (CSR) varies between cultures, for example, US model vs. European model. In this analysis it is also to observe that CSR is needed on moral grounds - the corporation exists within society; it needs infrastructure, employees and consumers from society (Young and Dhanda, 2013, pp. 189-192).

3. Policy and practice

The general strategic discussions above highlighted the justification of different goals related to social cohesion and economic innovativeness in the management of urban areas. The questions concerning the spatial and temporal extent of those goals have a

variety of specific policy-implications. Here a set of core issues emerge in relation to the balance of public vs. private actors; community vs. expert oriented knowledge; and the selection of the specific sustainability dimension to champion. While Young and Dhanda (2013, p. 215) note that the leading role in achieving sustainability is performed first by businesses (35%), second by NGOs (30%), and only third by governments (24%), they also note that government has four roles here: (1) policy development; (2) regulation; (3) facilitation; and (4) internal sustainability management. Below some illustrative examples of promising public policy suggestions already implemented are discussed (the selection of items is by no means comprehensive).

The issue, according to Holden (2008) is to integrate scientific rationality and human experience. In other words, how to bridge the gap between 'tough minded' and 'tender minded'; 'science' and 'stories'; statistical and non statistical info; (hard) facts and 'plurality'; 'science and technology' and 'democratic practices'; and so forth (there are many terminologies for the same kind of dichotomy). She asserts, quite concretely, that this gap should be overcome in planning and policy by pragmatic environmental philosophy; otherwise it would be impossible to move towards sustainable development in planning. While these are small steps, we need to start making them now, she points out. Citizens and experts need to be in an interaction along the path towards sustainable development planning policy, she concludes. It is difficult to disagree: a truly integrative approach to planning and sustainable development is possible through a pragmatic proposition (Holden, 2008).

Interestingly Holden (2010) brings up some more critical points in a later paper, where she argues for engaging in interdisciplinary work, but with a qualification that reactionary and anti-sustainable voices should not be taken uncritically at face value. The reason for this 'critique of sloppy critique' apparently is a caveat that ought to be noted: Holden (2010) sees participation and governance as solutions for overcoming unfounded critiques levied at the sustainability concept. It is of course good to be sceptical about the motivations of 'naysayers'. To give another example, Wild (2000) notes a controversy among sustainable development goals and strategies of local authorities in England. This is however a particularly pessimistic view, if one for example compare with the one purported by Holden (2008), above, where different views are combined pragmatically. The same pessimism can be found in the study by Williams and Lindsay (2007), in a rather spiritless manner, these authors criticise the private sector for delivering sustainable buildings in England - this despite their key observation being about the lack of relevant data on such buildings.

Learning new procedures and management principles is often argued to be the key to urban sustainability (see Campbell, 2000; Edén *et al.*, 2000). The difficulty in all attempts to implement more sustainable land use policies such as New Urbanism or Smart Growth arises from the confrontation between ideals and market realities; this is specifically true within a suburban context (Grant, 2009). Especially in a suburban context a move towards the pragmatic philosophy purported by Holden above seems a promising venture. Moreover, it can indeed be argued that, from a sustainable point of view, that suburbs are even more

problematic than distinguishingly urban areas - "the unsustainable nature of existing American suburbs" is referred to as 'elephant in the room' by Cowan (2012). This is interesting to compare with Jones and Evans (2013, pp. 187-207), who cover the corresponding British suburban experience.

Bailey (2010) champions the case of *Community Land Trusts* because of their creativity demonstrated in relation to financial viability models of sustainable housing provision in England. In doing so he argues for a more anthropocentric model rather than the eco-centric model that still today dominates the sustainability debate. This suggestion also supports the importance attached to cohesion and innovativeness in the present study insofar as citizen groups and people-centred institutions and organisations are put at the fore. The opportunities arising from land-use planning related community institutions (i.e. institutions that are neither public nor private) that manage real estate assets has also been discussed recently by Prince's Foundation (2010) and Gerber and colleagues (2011). Elsewhere, using case studies from different parts of the world Allen and Lloyd-Jones (2010) show that the creation of neighbourhood friendly organisational frameworks and processes is different in different neighbourhoods depending on how organisational issues are supported by asset management.

The *Smart City* approach to sustainable development is also increasingly considered in several countries including all EU member states. This approach is a 'mixed bag' of strategies that go beyond technical improvements, even though putting fibres so as to increase the internet accessibility of the

whole community is a key part of this approach. Cases of Zurich and Edmonton are good to mention here, as in both cities such applications are already in use ⁴. It is about GIS mediated real time data transfer between user and provider; using sensors, satellite technology and mobile devices this technology will be increasingly common in the future (See Perspectives, 2013).

Proponents of the Smart City argue for a real estate development principle where cutting edge technology is utilized to the maximum extent for modernization of the urban realm. Those who are staunch advocates of this approach see a promise in the way real estate developments are directed by real time data that increasingly becomes better available, and this, in turn, would foster democratic and inclusive participation. Furthermore, in this discourse a connection is made between agglomeration benefits and urban development principles based on human capital accumulation and technological change (Glaeser and Resseger, 2009). Well-known examples include the *New Songdo City* in Korea, *Masdar City* in Abu Dhabi and *PlanIT Valley* near Paredes in Portugal (Greenfield, 2013) ⁵. However not everyone are convinced that this is a positive development overall, for example, Greenfield (2013) is diametrically opposed to the basic idea of the Smart City approach, arguing that it is nothing but yet another unjust, unethical and an unsustainable business model, where real estate development is married with hi-tech solutions that are much based on surveillance data on ordinary citizens – by definition something that is anti-democratic and elitist.

To counter this critique, openness is a precondition (including open data); when moving from public-private-partnership (PPP) to PPP with people (PPPP). In this genre ICT is seen as an enabler of innovation and thereby also sustainable growth. In particular, it helps in bringing in unemployed people without ICT skills (Open days 2010; see also Mitchell and Casalegro, 2008). However, White and colleagues (2010) argue that the impact of ICT on reaching social sustainability is far from straightforward and may even be counter-intuitive. The crux of this argument is that some benefits of ICT such as a predicted reduction in travel mainly concerns high income workers, and therefore ICT is likely to lead to a more divisive development than what one would intuitively assume. This is a counterargument to an assumed positive association between innovativeness and cohesion where gains in the economic domain generate progress in the social realm. This claim may indeed have some truth in it, but even so, the relationship between ICT and cohesion can be affected by innovative procedures to a certain extent, as innovations can also possess social elements. Amidst constant development there is then a need to ‘twitch’ innovativeness towards a more socially cohesive – or even better, socially sustainable track.

Colantonio and Dixon (2011) note the increased significance of private sector funding in the UK, where banks in particular, have become important investors in *urban regeneration projects*. As a consequence, the business strategy of the large private sector actors is to tap into underserved markets in the inner city – this being in the US and UK context of run down inner cities. This way seen, it could be concluded that investment in urban regeneration areas is no longer

'niche' but mainstream economic activity. Either side – public or private – can own the developable land during the process of regeneration. Normally, the private partner puts 50% in equity (i.e. takes a loan against collateral) whereas the public pays 50% in cash or assets (including land). Colantonio and Dixon nevertheless lament the absence of similar evaluation metrics or measures for social sustainability as with its environmental and economic 'cousins' – yet such innovation would be crucial to evaluate the 'best practice' and bring the literature and paradigm forwards. The overall argument here is that urban regeneration has a strong social aspect – much concerning the requirement of cohesion, but it is also true that the UK needs private investments to an increasing extent.

When examining various possibilities for sustainable urban centred innovations, when evaluating the sustainability of urban regeneration in the UK Jones and Evans (2013), argue that the appropriate definition of sustainability requires a 'triple bottom line'. This is a basic concept where sustainability in all three general dimensions is reached (Cf. Dixon, 2007). This view is stricter than a partial view that only requires one or two dimensions – in a shortcut analysis often 'green' building is made synonymous for sustainability. This can be blamed on the absence of datasets and indexes, but also on the vague consensus regarding different definitions. Jones and Evans (2013) conclude that, while commonly elements such as mixed use and social integration are seen as key criteria for considering any regeneration scheme sustainable, even these elements are debated or questionable [but see Rauterkus and Miller (2011), who, based on an empirical study, promote the

development and redevelopment of walkable mixed use neighbourhoods in the US exactly because their sustainability]. Nevertheless these authors see great potential in urban regeneration to deliver holistic goals of sustainability. We can also see that in the UK the discussion on sustainable urban regeneration is divided into two rather different realms: whereas Colantonio & Dixon regard investment as the key, Jones and Evans consider planning to be the core mechanism here.

This selection of exemplifying policy tools illustrates the relationships between innovativeness and cohesion. This brief literature review suggests that, to a certain extent, the concepts brought up in the theoretical discussion are alive and well in practical and policy agendas. In one way or another, the balance between private activity and its public counterparts is the key to sustainable policies and practices – but which one is supposed to take a leading role when looking 15-20 years ahead? The private sector delivers products and services to the market, and the degree of sustainability is dependent on how the market values sustainability enhancing features, unless we talk about some other type of behaviour such as altruist individual choices, bandwagon effects on behaviour (i.e. imitation merely because of something being fashionable or 'hip') or sustainability simply being an approximation of comfort or health attributes that the consumer aspires to anyway. The public sector in turn has a role in setting pro sustainability incentives, regulations and guidelines at local, regional, national and supra-national levels. In this vein, some more specific examples of institutional and geographic circumstances are presented next. The discussion is partitioned into

three parts depending on whether the focus is on Western, post-socialist or lower developed country issues. Finally, based on this discussion a general three category framework/model for improvement is sketched.

4. Context dependent sustainable urban property management functions

4.1. Some examples or cases from Western countries

In general, in Continental Europe plenty of innovative schemes exist where private and public actors are encouraged to work in tandem, for example, in the Smart City framework discussed in the previous section. In Germany and Austria it has been found that cities can become sustainable naturally – so not so much in response to policies or directives, but rather through the ‘intrinsic logic’ mediated through local actors (Fendt, 2010; Pessina and Scavuzzo, 2010). One of the best examples of this approach is the *Smiley West* housing scheme situated in Karlsruhe, Germany. This is an actively touted sustainable property development that is established and completely run by its residents, who also are owner occupiers. The idea is that the residents build a spontaneous trust and community among themselves, and that this enables further uptake of potentially sustainability enhancing innovative ideas ⁶.

Holzmarkt in Berlin represents another example of this context dependent real estate development approach that we find in the German speaking world. *Holzmarkt* is a project situated in a Brownfield area in Friedrichshain, former East Berlin ⁷. It is partly also a waterfront project, albeit, one with alternative business, governance and design concepts. For example, lessees that

have a sustainable business model will pay a subsidised rent, whereas the normal lessees have to pay market rent; here much of the space will be provided for community and environment as well as cultural and leisure uses. Site visit (25 August, 2014) confirms that *Holzmarkt* is a fairly amazing place; it is obviously alternative, but also being run economically sensibly as well: there are bar functions and spaces for other informal leisure activities in small scale. It is however not possible to arrive at a definite verdict at the time of writing as most of this project is yet to be completed.

The aim of this project is to provide an inclusive urban milieu with variety in its functions as well as participants. Eventually this area is also meant to be self-sufficient. A necessary observation here is that no (apparent) residential functions beyond hostel accommodation is to be planned, which will set extra pressure on the feasibility requirement. The key question will eventually be as to whether the costs will be covered using such an approach. However, in the contract with the investor, a Swiss pension fund, it is stipulated that, in case the approach turns out to be non-viable, a more normal development concept based on luxury residences will be applied, which then would result in rather less sustainable outcome (*Holzmarkt*, 2014).

As an opposite of such bottom-up processes, the Dutch system relies on more top-down managements. The *Red-for-Green* mechanism is increasingly used in Dutch spatial developments. When we talk about economic sustainability, this Dutch practice of land development is a case in point: an ear-marked value capturing of the profitable parts of a new urban development project is subsequently used for financing

unprofitable parts of spatial developments such as landscape and hazards management as well as social arrangements (Goetgeluk *et al.*, 2005; de Wolff and Spaans, 2010). Indeed the policy frameworks can be considered rather flexible in the Netherlands (despite its top-down structure). Here it is however reason to note that this policy represents New Public Management in the sense that the shares of duties and benefits among the participants in the PPPs are defined by contracts.

In the following the UK and Nordic countries are selected as examples of sufficiently different circumstances of urban sustainability strategies. Yet on a general level these countries are similar insofar as their sustainability policies rely heavily on regulation. In the UK adaptable or successful developers have emerged since the late 90s, notably Urban Splash, *igloo*, ISIS and English Partnerships. For example, *igloo* Development Corporation recognises different elements for different professional or cultural groups of people, and, in doing so, indirectly, accept that there are different characters of 'one and the same place' – or rather that different people perceive a given characteristic of the place differently⁸. The fact is that value systems change, and as a consequence, also the basis for price premiums (and discounts) changes, for example in relation to energy and social issues.

In the Nordic countries, in contrast, the lack of population pressure has thus far meant a lesser urgency to implement sustainability agendas: when current resources suffice the need to look for alternative solutions that would involve cooperation between private and public spheres is not as urgent as it is in other

European circumstances. However, differences in practice and research are huge between these countries too (see Edén *et al.*, 2000). Especially in Norway a rather rigid system of spatial planning and land use regulation is in place. The municipality still has a negative, regulating attitude to new building by private parties, even if some cooperation takes place. Incidentally, Norwegian planners are found to be more sceptical to private developers than in Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands or even USA (Sager, 2010). Here the tendency is that conflicts arise in any particular land use or development issue between public and private actors. Therefore it is fair to conclude that the uncritically positive sustainability evaluation of these countries is a common misconception. Nevertheless, some innovative tools are developed in Sweden such as the 'urban landscape' concept in plans meant to secure urban biodiversity (see Erlander *et al.*, 2005).

Another common misconception concerns USA: while some see liberal markets and sustainable development as incompatible goals, the fact is that few countries have as innovative sustainable development agendas as USA. In particular, there New Urbanist developers have actively pursued sustainability related motivations, as documented by Deitrick and Ellis (2004), Grant (2009), Larsen (2005), Morrow-Jones, Irwin & Roe (2004) and Song and Knaap (2003). Furthermore, currently sustainable growth management is being introduced; in particular, Florida's Optional Sector Planning (OSP) approach is seen as promising in this respect (see Chapin, 2012). Overall, in the US urban sustainability policies with respect to building innovations (i.e. green building

policies) have a huge rate of adaption since the turn of the Millennium, as evidenced by Kontokosta (2011); this innovativeness is presumably due to the open communication between cities and stakeholders. Canada (Grant, 2009), Australia (see Robinson and Edwards, 2009; and Crabtree and Hes, 2010) and New Zealand are other countries with promising track records in sustainability evaluation. The CLT and urban regeneration tools discussed in the previous section also represent advanced practices within an Anglo-Saxon sustainability tradition.

Optimistically considered, all these experiments to a certain extent connect to cohesion and innovativeness oriented sustainability ideals. However, these models typically are designed for and established in the industrialised country context. For example, Colantonio and Dixon (2011, pp. 215-216) are rather Eurocentric in their assessment of such transferability of socially sustainable urban regeneration models. An interim conclusion can now be drawn about the experiences from what we refer to as the 'developed' or 'Western' urban circumstances. Here the most positive evaluations of sustainability are for those cases where the private sector drives the development. This is due to the ability of private actors to constantly seek new opportunities – either via including sustainability in the profit calculations or by using some kind of innovative, more alternative scheme – to generate economic surpluses from which infrastructure and social and environmental amenities subsequently can be financed (as was illustrated earlier in fig 1). True sustainability furthermore requires the combination of spontaneous bottom-up processes with innovative incentive schemes of top-

down character. Thus the public policy level is not to be forgotten in this context.

4.2. Extreme unsustainability and how to combat it in the post-socialist context

The post-socialist context shows several educational cases in point where learning from mistakes is possible, at least in theory. When considering the CEE case of sustainability actions vis-a-vis the actual environment, Vásárhelyi (2006) notes that the path embarked upon after the transition, namely, having local responsibility instead of any state involvement in sustainable development, turned out to be an over-ambitious plan. The problems were of two kinds: lack of finance and lack of knowhow. The latter problem could be alleviated by educating professionals. In particular, the issue was about “how to cope” – that is to say, as to how to revert the “tragedy of the commons”. Elsewhere Gulácsy and colleagues (2006) argue that sustainability and environmental policy should pay attention to decision-making in relation to individual persons.

Even when dealing with relatively developed CEE circumstances gross inaptness in these issues is observable. To give an illustrative example, until 2001 the Czech Republic lacked a sustainable development strategy. Even the research on sustainability was not rooted in fundamental theoretical issues such as ecological footprint or environmental space. However, the floods 2002, worst in 150 years made people aware of these issues. As a consequence the “catastrophic form” theory of ecological footprint and environmental space begun to replace the traditional “non-catastrophic

form” theories. This enticed an inventory of “what possibly can happen” and “how to prepare for that situation” which is a vital element of sustainability (Mezřický, 2006).

Vaishar and Green-Wootten (2006) assert that sustainable development requires more local and less state interference, the former being an ideal and the latter the result of the past. They purport the regional level as the most feasible level of action, this based on best practice from Moravia (one of the two main regions that together constitute the present day Czech Republic). Furthermore, the sustainability of a given region ought to be informed on interdisciplinary research, they conclude. On the other hand, it is to note that, in general, the “Eastern European miserablist literature” established since the mid 1990s has undermined many attempts to constructively evaluate the institutional and cultural legacies, where contemporary decision makers must act based on their rather reserved attitudes, individualistic values and harsh economic realities (cf. Ladányi, 1993; Hegedüs *et al.*, 1994; Kovács, 1998; Silhankova *et al.*, 2011).

Based on evidence from Bucarest Moțcanu-Dumitrescu (2015) notices the following points:

- Conversion and reconversion of the valuable particularity in terms of cultural and artistic goods is a strategy to attract private capital (i.e. cultural competitiveness strategy).
- This in turn opens an opportunity for sustainable urban regeneration of this city.
- The local administration in this city faces limited space availability for future development.

- The more pressing problem is the ever worsening mixture of unemployment, poverty and physical degradation.
- Development of existing enterprises, creation of new ones and raising the employability of the workforce are seen as real challenges, but manageable, ideally through risk mitigation and an integrated approach.
- Most important measures proposed include reuse of existing areas, combating sprawl, and the like.
- There is an agreement of mixing the city’s past and current industrial heritage, and by implication, improvement of the quality of the industrial sites wherever there is possibility of new urban development.

On balance of this discussion by Moțcanu-Dumitrescu it can be concluded that Bucharest, in interim terms, has seen the possibility of combining public and private interventions towards a strategy geared at sustainable reuse of industrial sites in the city.

Here recent evidence from a recently completed research project from two Hungarian cities (Budapest and Szeged) can serve to indicate some of the argumentation surrounding sustainable urban development. In Budapest the results indicated cultural heritage playing a role insofar as old well maintained blocks clearly function as a positive impact on the daily life of locals; heritage also is a ‘magnet’ for those coming from further afield including tourists⁹. This is not to say that more obvious sustainability features are absent; only that they are not distributed uniformly across the whole urban or suburban space. In Szeged in turn the issue was

more about green dimensions, mixed use, moderate density, walkability and easy use of bicycle, and public transport and other rather unquestionable features of urban sustainability. The conclusions furthermore suggest that a relatively well-developing regional city such as Szeged might be more successful in generating sustainable urban housing market locations and micro-environment than a capital city such as Budapest (See Kauko, 2013).

When examining the balance between private and public activities for these circumstances too, Áron Horváth (personal communication), who is a real estate economist specializing in this topic, has found that more developed countries have smaller fluctuations in real estate markets than lesser developed countries. His other conclusion is that more regulations bring more fluctuations and less market stability. This suggests a learning process from a more unstable market towards a more stable and – presumably – desirable one. In other words, when we move towards a more mature market context, which is also what most market players want, the need for drastic policy or legal measures decreases. Thus this path is about trial and error with big regulative corrections being necessary in the beginning of this search when the environment is immature and much burdened by the past mistakes, and later smaller adjustments, when a path towards a more mature context is found¹⁰. Leaving out the speculative investors, in this backpropagation of errors a more stable market is to be preferred, and when we begin nearing such definitions the need for error correction (i.e. government interference) is smaller¹¹. However, in a subsequent report, Horváth and Révész (2014) observe that, when looking at 258

European cities and 136 Asian-Pacific cities, it is only in the latter group where the above mentioned claim holds. These authors nevertheless uphold their “point about the geographically differing nature of the real estate adjustment processes”.

While these suggestions on the relationships between regulation and market fluctuations may still be misleading as a general model, the corollary here is that we really should not forget the economic sustainability dimension even when we move away from typically Western urban contexts. In other words, unless a given real estate sector, in a given place, becomes marketable for individual owners/renters, project developers and institutional investors, the market development trend remains unsustainable. From this follows that, while it is important that government regulation, public policy and planning issues are the keys to successful post-socialist urban transitions, the economic context – thus the private sector investment and industry perspective – cannot be played down at the expense of other issues such as social cohesion or cultural values. Thus, first, a ‘mature market’ needs to be set up for residential transactions and building. This requires the government to set the apt institutions and policies to support such market development. Subsequently, sales of new developments and renovated stock will bring profits and these profits need to be directed to long term investment in affordable homes, landscaping and other infrastructure (as discussed in the case of Western circumstances and figure 1 earlier). There really is no other way to embark on a positive spiral of urban quality development for this group of countries.

4.3. Urban poverty issues of underdeveloped regions

Purely financial-economic aspects notwithstanding, as billions of poor are excluded from the access to productive resources it is justified to speak about a social bubble based on poverty and inequity. Currently the top 20th percentile of the world's population by income consumes 60 times more than the 20th percentile in a time when humankind faces environmental harm and resource shortages. While all these problems could in principle be mitigated, in the aftermath of the financial collapse world leaders lost a major opportunity to allocate a much larger share of the investments to green investments instead of mainly propping up the banks and promoting unsustainable consumption. Even economically less fortunate consumers can however be encouraged to behave more sustainably economically, socially and environmentally, as they too are stakeholders when it comes to sustainable development. It can be argued, however, that, in doing so, the current third-world subsidising practice needs to be replaced with a practice that triggers innovation at the grass-roots level (Munasinghe, 2010).

In this context three recent issues (each related to one of the three main dimensions) attract attention:

1. Economic sustainability: as long as informal *property rights* are not formalised (i.e. registered in the cadastre system in such a way that they can – in the spirit of Hernan de Soto – be used as collateral for loans¹²), the weakness of the property rights raises transaction costs and thereby hinders development (Mooya and Cloete, 2007).
2. Social sustainability: *Millennium Development Goals (MDG, 1999)* have, despite the best intentions of the UN, not managed to overcome the difficulty of distributing the funds to the local level – much of the transfers seem to get stuck at a national level due to corrupt middle-men and general ineffectiveness of procedures (Satterthwaite, 2008)¹³. In particular, Satterthwaite (2003) has criticised MDG for the reliability of the statistics applied.
3. Environmental sustainability: A common argument is that, to care about environmental issues, a certain minimum level of affluence is required; that is to say, poverty triggers a lack of *environmental awareness*, which leads to disastrous environmental impacts, and that this also has economic consequences (e.g. Petrişor, 2015).

According to Mohan Munasinghe (keynote speech, 2012) the problem is that, while currently 80% of the global consumption is done by the rich, at the same time we are promising prosperity to the poor despite having already reached our global carrying capacity. We can solve this problem using two tools: (1) governments push businesses towards the right direction; (2) bottom-up processes, i.e. spontaneous activity (reduce energy, carbon neutrality etc) need to be encouraged. He continues by outlining the *Sustainomics* conceptual framework: how to get the poor countries to develop sustainably, by creating economic livelihoods, instead of giving handouts to the poorest. We would start with creating a few sustainable producers; then creating a few sustainable consumers; finally, make these groups support each other in a sustainable market. The essence of this

approach is to establish bottom-up business activity that does not expect financial handout policies¹⁴. Other recent textbooks on the topic are by and large in agreement (cf. Young and Dhanda, 2013).

Unfortunately, in much of the current discourse of human geographers, these issues are dealt with in a rather black and white manner that hinders any constructive development approach in the above suggested vein. For example, Potter and colleagues (2012) categorically blame 'neo-liberalism' for every problematic development manifestation in the global south. However, after the discussion on the post-socialist context above, one might be sceptical towards any sustainability merits of such politically biased views as this [or the utopian one based on environmental justice and urban political ecology propagated by Cook and Swyngedouw (2014), for that matter]. What about corrupt and incompetent political and economic leaders of local regimes in developing countries? And what about their inability to develop functional logistics systems and financial mechanisms required for a truly competitive entrepreneurial local culture to take off?¹⁵

Moreover, Potter and colleagues do not have much trust in sustainable development policy that they, in general terms, consider incoherent and inefficient. They state that "the plight of the global South's poor's majority does not feature prominently among the global goals of contemporary sustainable development" (p. 108). This highlights the limitations of the neo-Marxist oriented approach to deal with the challenges of a modern sustainability agenda. The view put forward of the current paper is that,

while a zero sum game with an inbuilt destructive automata of capitalism in the sense postulated by the neo-Marxists clearly is an invalid conclusion, the sustainability of capitalism depends on the education of consumers and professionals as well as on the implementation of smart regulations and economic incentives. Obviously, the issue is to validly criticize neoliberal government policies. The proposition here is to replace this antagonism between neo-Marxists and neoliberals with a genuinely sustainable development view in relation to institutional, evolutionary, ecologic and complexity economics and human behaviour (see Foxon *et al.*, 2012).

4.4. Summarizing: Towards an empirically testable framework

In a nutshell, the tendencies suggested by Horvath above can be extended to cover all three institutional contexts. It was hypothesised that circumstances with less market interference by state, municipality or other public sector actor are associated with more mature markets. The trial and error of market correction then is reduced, recursively, the more mature the market becomes. And as a consequence, given that a mature market is what most of the market players want to achieve, there would be less need for further market interference. However, the crux of the argument is that preconditions for a mature market must be set up first, which in turn involves strong government steering.

Figure 2 summarizes the three country- and city-specific urban development and sustainability contexts put forward above. The developed (or Western) type of cases comprises the starting point and benchmark for the other two cases.

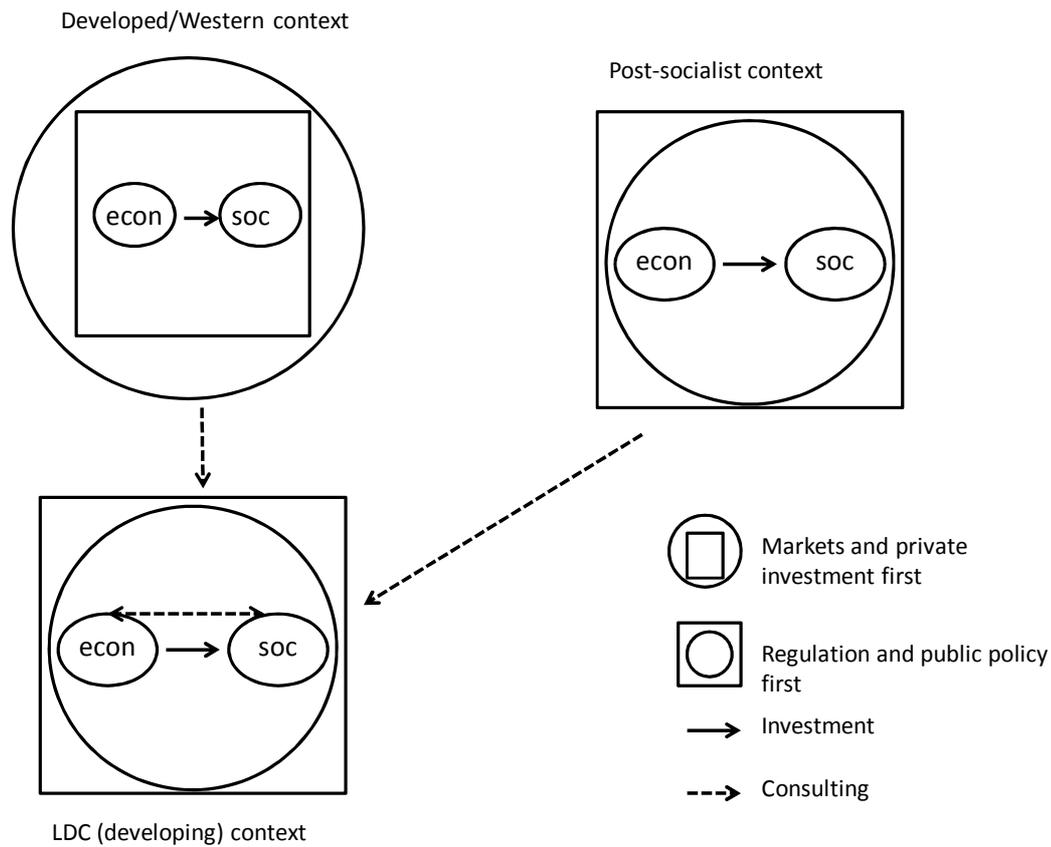


Fig. 2. Empirically testable framework for the three cases of urban development and sustainability

Here it is assumed – based on the literature and best practice – that by sustaining the optimal preconditions for the market to trigger private investment activity within a favourable institutional framework also the social and cultural spheres will gain in the long run (akin to the case of late Medieval Florence). On the other hand, the discussion above has shown that, while the same applies: economic surplus being the source for financing the social (and cultural) arenas, the need for government steering is stronger in the post-socialist and LDC cases. This is due to their lesser market maturity levels. Furthermore, as long as market structures are yet at an early stage of development it is important that also experiences from the more social agendas (including cohesion) are used to consult the more economic agendas (including innovativeness) in a constant feedback process, and not only in the direction from economic to the social. That

is to say, policy discourse is developed through trial and error and through learning by doing. Here obviously experiences from both Western and post-socialist contexts are of valuable use in informing how the LDC system is to be set on a case by case basis.

5. Conclusions

A constructive approach to evaluate urban sustainability in a land use and area development context would be welcome. The broader issue here is about providing services that are not only ‘green’ but preferably also sustainable in other ways – the social and economic dimensions are also worth considering. While the point here is about incremental changes rather than ‘one grand planning vision’, the further issue concerns how economic sustainability can generate environmental and social sustainability with view on long-term developments. The solution to this

lies in designing an economic long-term strategy; the issue at stake is about making the buildings and neighbourhoods more sustainable, or just 'greener', by reinvesting the profits made from developments. When that is carried out consistently over the built environment of a whole urban area together with apt incentives and regulations set on national, regional and local levels, together with capacity building through participatory procedures, we are able to confirm patterns of sustainable urban development at the level of blocks and neighbourhoods.

To steer the investments on a sustainable track can be argued to be more important than the government regulations in relation to sustainability, as these tend to be outmoded quickly, and the private sector in general has better chances to improve the quality as well as to handle risks. While it is reasonable to assume that even government structures will eventually adapt to sustainability criteria, the immediate aims are likely to be more of 'bottom-up' than 'top-down' character¹⁶. The arguments put forward in this contribution suggest that the most sensible approach is to look at how organic change (i.e. change that happens more continuously and incrementally, as a result of market based processes), as opposed to government induced change (i.e. change that is the result of policy/political actions - specifically targeted or as 'happenstances' otherwise), is possible by convincing investors, developers and homebuyers about the needs to engage in sustainable strategies. While this is not to deny a role for government, this role is however largely in stimulating - rather than regulating or direct provision of - conversions, refurbishments and new developments into sustainable modes. The pivotal issue is in other words about educating the

mass of real estate actors to voluntarily apply sustainability thinking.

The low developed circumstances are of course particularly challenging in this respect. Until the early 2000s, the old development paradigm was about feeling pity and thinking of ways to help the global poor. Today, it is about including them into the business activity - to look at them from a business perspective. The rationale is to create value for this business activity and value for the people who live in poverty but can increasingly engage in this business activity. Munasinghe's idea of setting up the contextual frameworks and preconditions for exchange rather than continuing with financial subsidies is the key here. When demonstrating the local opportunities for economic gains one problem however is to convince those trained in Marxist ideology; the conventional wisdom of development studies obviously shifts the blame on former colonial powers, multi-national corporations and global financial capitalism rather than looks at the barriers resulting from institutional and cultural factors, most notably substandard logistics systems, corruption and destructive local customs and practices. Thus it can be argued that, a critique of neoliberal politics is necessary but does not equal following a neo-Marxist approach.

Thus, despite the inevitable ideological-institutional counterarguments ¹⁷, it is possible to find a logical reasoning for a private actor driven agenda. It is evident that the successful implementation of sustainable urban development requires first and foremost private investments that are channelled transparently, innovatively and with long-term goals. Moreover, to support this aim a certain degree of government involvement is also required. Economic sustainability - and by

implication innovativeness – is essential for any development if the strategy is to set up a functioning local market and community system. After the economic sustainability is secured the next issue becomes that of how to channel the funds to generate social and environmental sustainability. The social dimension – including issues relating to social cohesion – is the less explored dimension of the two, as it needs more exact definitions than what currently is used for policy evaluation (cf. Bramley et al., 2009; Allen and Lloyd-Jones, 2010; Manzi et al., 2010a,b; Colantonio and Dixon, 2011).

6. Endnotes

1. Some might consider this another ‘ism’ – a religion-like fad, soon to be forgotten. My take on the situation is that it is not, because – as argued in this paper – this is still an evolving paradigm with exact definition of concepts yet to be agreed upon. So the difference between what I see as ‘isms’ and the sustainability discourse is small, but significant.
2. For an altogether different kind of criticism, see Cook and Swyngedouw (2014), who encourage looking for ‘utopian ideas’ instead of what they call ‘the sustainability industry’ where [sic] socio-ecological justice and inequality is ignored. According to Cook and Swyngedouw, true urban sustainability should be political – not just technological and organizational. Their view would combine Political ecology and Environmental justice approaches. On the other hand, while such a view is praised among critical geographers, is it really constructive? In the present paper the perspective offered is rather realist and pragmatic rather than utopian. And sustainability is not really a political issue (as observed by Manzi and colleagues, 2010b).
3. However, the meaning of this concept is different: think, for example, how suburban HiTech areas develop on former agricultural land, largely depending on the dynamics of the networks forming between spinoffs, as the case of Silicon Valley shows (Glaeser, 2011, pp. 29-34).
4. In Zurich it is an application that synchronises ambulance services and another application that reports potholes or broken street lights to the council.
5. These are all mega-projects on greenfield land, none of which is completed at the time of writing this; for an Real Option approach to analysing the viability of the *New Songdo City* project, see Geltner and de Neufville, 2012a,b).
6. Field inspection suggests these people ostensibly represent the ‘liberal younger middle-class’.
7. Technically this case should be included in the next section on post-socialist contexts, but as it represents the bottom-up Western European approach and is begun two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is appropriate to include in this section.
8. The Prince’s Foundation (2010) could be mentioned in the same vein.
9. We can in this vein also note another magnet of this city: the thermal spas with recreational and health function.
10. This importance of setting the apt institutions for the market is a basic argument and supported by various data (see e.g. Chin and Dent, 2005; Bochniarz and Cohen, 2006).
11. While most of the post-socialist context today is characterised by various degrees of liberal real estate market, in some cases the government still has the main role in deciding where to invest and what to develop. To give an illustrious example, Minsk comprises

an example of such a strictly imposed centrally regulated economic (and indeed social) system. According to what Belarusian scholars have told me, in this city some of the features manifest in other post socialist cities are absent here - notably, there is no *buzz* and also not sufficient trust for PPP (let alone PPPP) to occur.

12. The logic is to raise start capital in order to realise ones business ideas. When brought to the market place this would subsequently lead to development gains for the whole community. Thus it is far more important to formalise and register property ownership rights in the undeveloped country context than in the developed one.
13. Here it is also reason to refer to Berman and colleagues (2013), who presents findings against "injecting lots of money into conflict zones" in the face of their assumed encouragement of corruption and violence.
14. Cheryl Hicks (keynote speech, 2012) is in agreement: that economic growth for the poor countries might be possible. Here the context matters: we need to identify the hotspots of consumption for different markets. It is a two level development: first, to design policies; and after that, to change of our own values.
15. To answer this question, Beattie (2010) provides a more analytic platform (despite being a journalistic rather than scientific writing).
16. See also Wallner et al. (1996), who argue that 'islands of sustainability'- an island being 'an area where sustainability is reached at a local or regional level'- can act as cells of development within this context.
17. An earlier version of this paper was submitted to a British planning journal, where my proposition did not

find sympathy. The Editor did not however offer any reasoning to support a public oriented position, but merely used his authority to refute my proposition, by claiming that "...there is evidence to the contrary" . No, Mr Editor, I dont think there is. Or if there is, why not show me?

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