

Regeneration and Affordable Housing: a Way Forward to Sustainable Communities

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Introduction

Infrastructure plays an imperative role in the development and continuation of every community and society, (Richards, pp. 11-12, 2000) and thus, this paper will be endeavoring to focus on the same topic, specifically, on the issue of sustainable communities that has been a focus of a number of governments and countries around the globe. However, the paper will try to understand this issue and its related factors in the context of its development in the United Kingdom. As decades are passing, humans have now realized that it is very imperative that natural resources should be utilized in a balanced manner, (Mullins & Murie, 2006) and particularly, according to the capacities of environment that may be able to serve the future generations ahead. (Lafferty, pp. 19-21, 2001) In this regard, notion of sustainable communities have been considered by governments, experts, and environmentalists to adapt approaches according to climate changes and developmental plans according to the natural resources, rather than techniques that use the energy resources excessively. (Church, pp. 40-43, 2004) In this regard, unsustainable prototypes of development are being discouraged by the UK Government, while motivating patterns with zero-emissions.

Communities play a crucial role in the daily activities of its members. In this regard, it is very imperative that its various components should be built in such a manner that they may influence the lives in a positive manner. Studies have noted that building structures and behaviors of institutions have a significant capacity to control the available energy resources, and thus, they play a pivotal role in acquiring response from climate changes. (SDC, pp. 80-84, 2007) In addition, strategies for the improvement of transportation and land utilization are noteworthy

in contributing to an environment-friendly location that is beneficial for members of the communities.

Experts have indicated that an enormous amount of changes is required to create sustainable communities from the present communities running on excessive carbon usage. (Barton, pp. 60-65, 2000) In this regard, efforts and attempts carried out to create an environment-friendly community have been termed as sustainable community, which allows future generations to benefit from the natural resources around the globe. It is agreed by majority of the experts that any efforts made in relation to sustainable communities will give its fruits after the year 2020 and climate changes will be influenced positively. (UBC, pp. 3, 2008) Yet, it is necessary that such efforts should be commenced now since this decade is considered the era of developments, and thus, it will be easy to bring changes in the fundamental approaches that may overcome problems for the future generations. In this regard, UK Government along with local authorities has played a crucial and decisive role in transforming UK cities and towns into sustainable communities, and in other words, low-carbon eco-cities.

Luck and chances are considered major decisive factors in human history; however, such things do not work in creation of sustainable communities. On contrary, futuristic vision and commitment are some of the factors that can transform a city or town in environment-friendly hub. In addition, experts have indicated that such efforts cannot only be done by governmental authorities, and it is very essential that civic community and professionals should provide their support and skills, in order to achieve such long-term objective. However, in order to understand the consequences and benefits of sustainable communities, it is very imperative that such term should be described and discussed along with its different characteristics and factors associated with it.

### Definition & Understanding of Sustainable Communities

According to understanding of majority of the experts, when resources are utilized by communities in such a manner that they may fulfill needs and requirements of its future members, such community is known as a sustainable community. Besides fulfillment of existing and upcoming generations, another major characteristic of sustainable community is its provision of high quality of life, decent housing along with different opportunities to enhance the living standards. (Gruder, pp. 23-28, 2007) In this regard, effective utilization of natural resources is one of the essential requisites in a sustainable community that may result in the accomplishment of abovementioned aims. Studies have indicated that environment is considered a very important in sustainable communities, as every step is taken according to its obligations. In addition to environmental objectives, social unity and solidity is one of the major advantages of such community, and in the result, a sustainable community is able to achieve economic prosperity. (Cooper, pp. 49-58, 2009) After detailed research and analysis, it is noted that a community requires a number of other characteristics as well, in order to recognize itself as a sustainable community.

Economy is one of the foremost requirements in a sustainable community, as provision of jobs and equal distribution of wealth can only be possible in presence of a prosperous economy. Secondly, it is noted that a number of communities having flourishing economy are unable to transform into a sustainable one and that occurs due to lack of strong leadership that is very essential to bring positive changes in the environment by proper utilization of economic ventures and resources. (Thompson, pp. 77-84, 2007) As earlier mentioned, local people and civic society constitute a huge percent of requisites, as notion of sustainable community cannot be possible without effectual commitment and participation of its own members. As creation of sustainable

community is a long-term process, thus, local participation is very significant, especially in the processes of planning and designing, as local members are more aware of their local environment, rather than an expertise from outside.

Greenery is necessary for a sustainable community as well, as safe and healthy members of a community will be able to participate effectively and positively in the processes, and thus, green spaces promote healthier lifestyle. Another important component of sustainable community is appropriate layout and availability of enough size of locality. It is observed that often-sufficient land has no appropriate layout, and sometimes, appropriate layout confronts lack of resources. (Krueger, pp. 101-112, 2007) In this regard, a balance of everything discussed is required to create a sustainable community. Experts have indicated that some towns are not in proper reach of urban hubs, and thus, lack of transport facilities result in non-existence of sustainable communities. Thus, effective transport infrastructure is part of the foremost planning processes at the time of visionary ideas related to sustainable communities.

Nowadays, buildings constitute a majority of land area in every community. Additionally, maximize utilization of resource is done by buildings and its users, and thus, individual and collective commitment of buildings is a major requisite of sustainable community. Besides requisites discussed earlier in the paper, some of the other requirements of a sustainable community are provision of educational opportunities, healthcare facilities, entertainment packages, and representation of local culture in an effectual manner.

Until now, the paper has endeavored to incorporate some components that have been considered by experts from different regions, as essential for a sustainable community. In specific, the UK Government at the time of introducing plans for building sustainable communities in the United Kingdom described such community through its seven important and

significant components or aspects; their understanding will allow a detailed analysis of the topic. Moreover, it will allow us to recognize the need and importance of sustainable communities in a better way, as to why such notion has been given significant importance.

### Social and Cultural Aspect

Every sustainable community is able to identify and present an identity on communal basis. In other words, creation of such a community harmonizes different processes and activities performed in the community on daily basis. A sustainable community does not tolerate presence of racial discrimination, and encourages engagement of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and religions. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004) According to the UK Government, vision of sustainable communities will provide various educational, leisure, and economical opportunities to its members that will promote friendly and supportive behavior in them. In the result, such harmony and sociable commitment in the community discourages and eliminates anti-social elements from the society. (Home Office Community Cohesion Unit, pp. 66-78, 2003) In other words, a sustainable community will generally have low levels of crime. In this regard, such cultural and social aspect of sustainable community involves abovementioned elements of tolerance, cultural identity, provision of opportunities, etc.

### Good Governance

As earlier described in the paper, good governance is another important aspect of sustainable communities. However, such governance is not limited to governmental authorities; however, an assimilation of government, private, and civic individuals is required in a sustainable community that may perform and lead different processes in a strategic, effective, and responsible manner. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004) Voluntary participation is another fundamental component and notion in the sustainable communities; as

volunteerism allows minimize utilization of funding and available resources, which will result in the recognition and promotion of civic values

#### Environmental Aspect

Foremost and fundamental aspect of sustainable communities is environment has been the major focus in the notion of such communities. In this regard, it is essential that all the developments and advancements should be done according to the available environmental resources in an efficient manner. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004) Waste minimization and recycling projects are some of the major activities performed in a sustainable community that results in the equal provision of similar resources to the upcoming generations. Moreover, a sustainable community utilizes and prefers ways of transportation that may result in least negative impact on the environment. (UK Department for Environment, pp. 39-48, 2005)

#### Quality Housing

According to aims and objectives of the UK Government, provision of a positive feeling by building quality-housing facilities is another important aspect of sustainable communities. However, such an esoteric notion has been the basis of argument among a number of scholars, as whether such objective is achievable or not. Besides disputes, many efforts are being carried out by the government and local authorities to bring a change in housing standards in different parts of the country. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004) Greener public places is one of the undertakings that have been done by the authorities to transform cities and towns into eco-friendly ones. It is noted by different studies that although British families require smaller houses; however, majority of the housing development since the last decade involves construction of 4-room houses, which seems to be a step away from the agenda of creating sustainable communities in the region. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004)

### Communication

It is believed that sustainable communities are the hub of efficient communication facilities that allow its members to communicate and travel in an environment-friendly manner. In addition, walking and cycling are promoted and encouraged in sustainable communities, and people are able to access parking facilities appropriately. (CABE Space, pp. 29-38, 2006) Moreover, technological advancements play an effective role in allowing members of the community to interact with other members of the human society in different parts of the globe. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004)

### Economy

Such aspect was described briefly earlier in the paper. In specific, a wide range of opportunities related to employment is provided by local authorities in sustainable communities, and members of the community are encouraged to communicate with other parts of the country to acquire more chances of economic prosperity. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004)

### Services

Education is considered a mandatory requisite in sustainable communities, where individuals are provided to perform well in schools, colleges, as well as, universities, as educated members of the community will take it to the higher places, as compared to illiterate individuals who may promote anti-social elements in the society. Besides education, healthcare and social services are provided in a high-quality manner, which is another feature of the sustainable community. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-21, 2004)

### Why

Until now, it would be clear as to why sustainable communities are being given so significance, as they promote a number of aspects of human life that promote prosperity, harmony, development, and continuation of communal activities in a prolong manner. Although it is a misconception that sustainable communities are just about housing facilities; however, it is not the case, as a wide range of aspects have been discussed that illustrated a expansive perspective of such communities, rather than just housing facilities. All the discussed aspects of sustainable communities allow its members to live a high-quality lifestyle, as well as, provide the similar access to future generations in the region.

### Problems

Until now, the paper has discussed some of the significant characteristics of sustainable communities, a futuristic vision of communities in the United Kingdom in the year 2020. Now the paper will endeavor to identify some of the problems that are being confronted by the UK Government while putting efforts for building sustainable communities in the region. Vulnerable population across the country is one of the crucial problems that are hindering the process of building such communities. (TCPA, pp. 20-28, 2008) Still, a number of people are not able to afford quality-housing facilities and thus, living in poor conditions. Moreover, lack of housing spaces is another issue that is being tackled by the governmental authorities. Studies have indicated that a majority of public servants are unable to afford homes due to their moderate incomes.

A very imperative issue that is hindering the process is wrong direction of already-passed projects across the country. It is noted that gap between the sustainable agenda and previous agendas is still wide, and thus, a collective role is required from government, private and public stakeholders to move towards the right direction. (Wulfhorst, pp. 123-134, 2006) Utilization of

land is another concern in the project of sustainable communities, as previous developments have not used in an efficient manner, and thus, it seems like a waste of greener spaces. Paper discussed some of the different aspects that are considered in the planning of sustainable communities. In this regard, one problem confronted by the authorities is lack of balanced approach. In other words, if one aspect is considered specifically, then the other aspects lack quality. In this regard, progress in only one or two components will result in unsustainable communities, which might have contrary effects on the society. Thus, it is very essential that all the programs and projects should be monitored extensively, in order to succeed.

### Homes

During the analysis, it was noted that the UK Government has planned a 'Supporting People Agenda' in which, people in deprived and vulnerable conditions will be considered and their living conditions will be enhanced and improved on fundamental basis. Although many experts do not agree with this agenda and find no connection with the creation of sustainable communities, detailed study indicated that it is very imperative that opportunities and economy should be distributed equally in the society; unequal distribution may provide contrary results. (The Prince's Foundation, pp. 9-13, 2007) In this regard, according to the UK Government, by the year 2010, a decent home will be in reach of every resident in the region. Regulations are being made to ensure first-rate service and behavior from a property owner, which is one of the issues in the region, and establishment of a new Single Inspectorate is part of such series of work. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 25-46, 2004)

Additionally, investments for the reformation of communities by 2010 is in process and until now, millions of pounds have been allocated and utilized to make the spaces greener and safer for a cleaner and eco-friendly environment. Moreover, it is believed that delivery of public

services according to basic standards is very essential for communities to become sustainable, specifically, in regions with deprived neighborhoods and vulnerable people. (Bass, pp. 35-40, 2002) In this regard, 'The Neighborhood Renewal Unit' has been established that will work to ensure the provision of abovementioned services and opportunities with the help of national, regional, and local authorities. Furthermore, issues related to anti-social elements will be focused by the Social Exclusion Unit that is responsible for ensuring effectively handling of social exclusion elements in the society. It seems like a number of steps are being taken by the government at the same time, and thus, it is very imperative that such efforts should be put collectively, rather than individually, as a single fracture in visionary path will result in failure of vision related to the creation of sustainable communities in the United Kingdom. (URBED, pp. 67-77, 2007)

Besides provision of social services and opportunities, financial help is part of wider range of sustainable project as well. It is observed that loans were given for renovating privately owned housing facilities according to new vision of sustainability under the Regulatory Reform Order in the United Kingdom. In the year 2004-05, approximately thirty million pounds were allocated for above-mentioned loans that supported many families in improving their living conditions, as it is one of the crucial factors of sustainable communities. (Raco, pp. 120-131, 2007) Additionally, older people and disabled people were considered especially under the funding project of Home Improvement Agencies that organized a number of programs to help and support vulnerable people in the region. (Help the Aged, pp. pp. 13-18, 2007)

Pathfinder is another major project under the sustainable communities' agenda. Under this agenda, issues related to abandon streets and areas would be considered to create plans along with investors to build new sustainable communities in there. ((Office of the Deputy Prime

Minister, pp. 49-64, 2004) According to the UK Government, approximately five hundred million pounds have been allocated under a new Market Renewal Fund that will be utilized for the execution of pathfinder projects in the region. In specific, some of the areas considered in Market Renewal Fund of Pathfinder are Birmingham and Sandwell, East Lancashire, Manchester, Newcastle, North Staffordshire, Oldham and Rochdale, etc. (Roseland, pp. 20-22, 2005)

Lastly, it is now being ensured that every new development, especially in London and South East region, is carried out according to the objectives and obligations of sustainable communities. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 12-40, 2004) Additionally, four growth areas have been identified; Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes/South Midlands, Ashford, and London - Stansted – Cambridge in which, new housing facilities will be determined intensely. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pp. 19-46, 2003) In this regard, modern methodology of construction is being promoted and encouraged by the government to build safer, greener, and high-quality sustainable communities across the country. Home ownership will be promoted, in order to improve the living standards, especially of social tenants.

In this regard, sustainable communities is a futuristic vision of the United Kingdom's Government and a number of experts around the globe who wants a safer, greener, and healthier globe by utilizing energy resources in minimize manner and building eco-friendly housing and transport facilities. During the research, it was observed that effectual measures have been taken by the government to ensure success in this mission. However, it is essential that all the parties involved in this task should move collectively in one direction, as it is a long-term project, whereas governments depart and new take over, and thus, it is possible that some of the objectives will be altered. In brief, creation of sustainable communities for the future is a

significant effort and approach to provide safer and environment-friendly environment to future generations. Conclusively, the paper has discussed some of the significant aspects of regeneration of housing, communication, and transport facilities through building sustainable communities. It is hoped that the paper will be beneficial for students, teachers, and professionals in better understanding of the topic.

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Total Words: 3065 Words