

Conceptualizing Sustainable Neighbourhoods through Collaborative Placemaking

Solomon ADEWUMI^a, Husam ALWAER^b, Vincent ONYANGO^c

^a University of Dundee, United Kingdom, s.a.adewumi@dundee.ac.uk

^b University of Dundee, United Kingdom, h.alwaer@dundee.ac.uk

^c University of Dundee, United Kingdom, v.onyango@dundee.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Neighbourhood planning which dates back to the closing decades of the nineteenth century has metamorphosed under various movements in an attempt to evolve places that are socially responsive, economically viable, and environmentally friendly. With the constraints of rapid urbanization, climate change, financial instability coupled with significant demographic and social changes, the ability of the contemporary approaches to neighbourhood planning have been questioned, as to if it can lead to delivery of sustainable settlements. In addition, the potential of a single-specialist profession thinking as the ‘messiah’ to resolve the dynamic urban problems has been challenged. This paper proposes how placemaking, which promotes citizens’ involvement and engagement in the plans and policies that shape the places where they live through an inclusive, collaborative, and design-led initiatives can provide a basis of a suitable approach for sustainable neighbourhood planning. The paper examines the nature of contemporary approaches in neighbourhood planning in the context of both developed and developing nations. While some degree of progress have been recorded by applying some of these initiatives across the various context, findings show that there is an urgent need to respond to the obvious shortcomings associated with the sectoral and individual attempts to tackle the problems that confronts the 21st century neighbourhoods. In proposing the transdisciplinary and collaborative placemaking approach, its salient key features and processes are highlighted in this paper and how it could be the game changer in delivering sustainable neighbourhoods. The paper concludes with recommendations on how collaborative placemaking can further be enhanced in practice, academia, and in policy making.

Keywords: collaborative placemaking, neighbourhood, sustainable

1. INTRODUCTION

The neighbourhood can be regarded as the building block of a city with a potential to determine the sustainability of that particular nation as it has been well established that the battle for sustainable urban planning will be won or lost in the city (Komeily & Srinivasan, 2015). This submission clearly justifies the attention that the neighbourhood scale of spatial development deserves as the planning unit of urban centres (Rohe, 2009). While the campaign for sustainable urban planning has continued to take the central stage in academia, practice, and policy making (Berardi, 2011), of necessity is the need to examine how it can best be delivered at the neighbourhood level. Since the beginning of the 20th century till date, there have been several approaches adopted to evolve sustainable settlements- an endeavour that has resulted to the emergence of various movements. However, taking an unbiased view to assess the state of neighbourhoods in both developed and developing country context, the ideal neighbourhood suggested by Roberts (2009:128) where people ‘can live, work, prosper, and enjoy good quality of life now and in the future’ is still a challenge to the 21st planning.

Aside from the generic sustainability issues like environmental degradation, global warming, and social inequality among others, various countries of the world are seeking for ways to abate their peculiar sustainability challenges. Developed countries like the USA are battling urban sprawl and high car dependency; UK is trying to reduce energy demand and consumption (Edwards, 2014) while developing countries like Nigeria for example is confronted with urban slum, inadequate amenities and infrastructures, waste control and management, and insecurity. The aim of this paper therefore is to conceptualize sustainable neighbourhood through collaborative placemaking. The objectives to be pursued are: (i) to examine sustainable neighbourhood planning; (ii) to examine the contemporary approaches to neighbourhood planning in different context and their shortcomings in order to justify a need for a paradigm shift; (iii) to introduce the concept and key issues of collaborative placemaking; (iv) to examine the nexus between collaborative placemaking and sustainable neighbourhood planning.

Although there have been series of studies carried out independently on sustainable neighbourhoods (Barton et al., 2010; Barton, 2000; Wheeler, 2013) and placemaking (Arefi, 2014; Parlemo and Ponzini, 2015), there is no evidence in literature of a study that to establish a correlation between sustainable urban neighbourhood planning and collaborative placemaking. This is therefore a fundamental gap in research which this paper attempts to address. How can a sustainable neighbourhood be conceptualised through collaborative placemaking is the main research question of this study.

2. WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD?

A neighbourhood is a local unit within which people are personally acquainted with each other by reason of residential proximity (Lynch, 1981). While the term neighbourhood could be subjective in terms of its size, it should typically refer to an area that can be traversed by foot with some distinct and unifying social, architectural, historical, and economic features (Wheeler, 2013). Although, ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘community’ are often used interchangeably in literature, the former refers to the fabric (such as streets, buildings, facilities, and green spaces) while the later refers to the people in the neighbourhood (Barton et al., 2010). A sustainable neighbourhood according to Roberts (2009) is the spatial manifestation of sustainability principles. A sustainable neighbourhood should be compact, supports pedestrian movement, and mixed-use in design in which many daily living activity can be carried out within the shortest possible distance through interconnected networks of streets (Charter for the New Urbanism, 2015). A sustainable community according to the ODPM (2004) must address the issues of good governance; transport and connectivity; services; environmental; economy; housing and built environment (figure 1).



Figure 1: A sustainable community (Source: Egan Review, 2004)

3. CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING AND THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Although the neighbourhood planning predates the concept of sustainability, the campaign for sustainable urban planning at the local level (chapter 28 of Agenda 21) led to renewed interest in developing new initiatives and paradigms to address sustainability issues at the neighbourhood scale of spatial development (Farr, 2008; Rohe, 2009). Prior to this time in history, attempts have been made to create liveable, environment-friendly, and prosperous places through the neighbourhood planning model. The sustainable neighbourhood planning is therefore an extension of urban planning and design trends of the early 20th century works of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden city; the Neighbourhood unit of Clarence Perry; the modernism movement initiated by Le Corbusier and

Frank Lloyd Wright; the neo-traditional (new urbanism) movement of the likes of Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Peter Calthorpe; the eco-urbanism; and the latest being the smart growth movement (an advancement to the neo-traditional movement).

Contemporary approaches to enhance sustainable neighbourhood planning are traceable to several initiatives from the academia, practitioners and policy makers in various parts of the world. In the developed countries, the 21st century heralded the development of Neighbourhood Sustainability Assessment Frameworks through which a master plan can be evaluated against an array of Sustainability criteria and indicators (Al Waer and Kirk, 2015). Sustainability Assessment is carried in order to evolve a better scheme of development (Gibson et al., 2005) by integrating a wide range of assessment practices that are concerned with long-term impacts of development (Al Waer and Kirk, 2015). Examples of these frameworks include BREEAM communities in UK; LEED for Neighbourhood development in USA; CASBEE in Japan; and Green STAR Communities in Australia among others. Coupled with these assessment frameworks was the development of the Neighbourhood Quality Assessment Tools which can be used to assess the quality of neighbourhoods (Nickelson et al., 2013). Several governments agenda like the 'Towards an urban renaissance' (a report by the UK Urban Task Force) of 1999; The Planning Advice Note (PAN, 83 prepared by the Scottish government in 2008); and the Plan 2030 of the Abu Dhabi Planning Council are also worth mentioning.

While Neighbourhood Sustainability Assessment frameworks and Quality Assessment Tools are yet to evolve in most developing countries (Berardi, 2013), the existing planning laws are outdated and as a result have failed to meet the present urbanization demands and challenges. What is observable in these countries is the adoption of urban neighbourhood regeneration which is the reconstruction and upgrading of deteriorating neighbourhoods. It is a deliberate effort to effect a change in an urban environment by large scale adjustment of existing area to meet the present and future requirements for urban living and working. However, not much progress have been recorded with these initiatives as expected in both developed and developing countries context due to the persistent urban problems that are obvious. Consequently, the ability of the contemporary approaches to neighbourhood planning in the 21st century has been questioned. The Neighbourhood Sustainability Assessment framework for instance has been questioned on the basis of the following uncertainties:

- The involvement stakeholders in its development (Brandon and Lombardi, 2011; Sala et al., 2015)
- The consideration of existing statutory and legal planning framework (Berardi, 2011)
- Adoption of a holistic approach of sustainability issues and how balanced it is in its choice of indicators (Srinivasan and Komeily, 2015);
- Whether it can be adopted for use in another context (Joss et al., 2015).

While the urban regeneration programme has helped in revitalizing the urban neighbourhoods in developing countries by evolving new houses, apartments, offices, shops, schools, the approach has been criticized as it most often result to break-up of communal relationship; congestion of the nearest neighbourhood due to migration of displaced residents; and the upsetting existing economic systems and opportunities. These identified limitations of the contemporary approaches to neighbourhood planning in both developed and developing countries context call for a paradigm shift in the planning and delivery of the 21st century neighbourhoods.

4. PLACEMAKING

4.1 Basic concepts and key aspects

Placemaking is a collaborative process of shaping a community's public realm with a goal to maximize shared value through creative pattern of use and emphasis on the physical, cultural, and social identities that defines a place (Project for Public Space, 2016). Making better places is not new as the earlier works of Jane Jacobs in *The death and life of great American cities* (1961); William H Whyte in *The social life of small urban spaces* (1980) and Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) attest to this. In recent times, the works of Jan Gehl in *Cities for people* (2010), *How to study public life* (2013), *Public space, public life* (1996); and Herbert Girardet in *Cities People Planet* (2010), while advocating for placemaking provide practical guidelines for creating liveable, healthy, and safe places. Placemaking according to Arefi (2014) can triggered by needs, opportunities, or by assets as shown in figure 2 and explained:

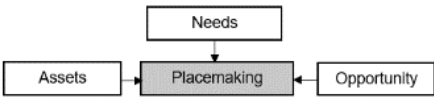


Figure 2: Placemaking paradigms(Source: Adapted after Arefi (2014))

While the placemaking stimulated by the forces of needs and opportunity have been criticised for being a top-down approach, with dependency on government resources and the sovereignty of expert knowledge over local knowledge, asset-based placemaking creates an atmosphere of synergy and interaction within which experts and non-experts can have a common ground for the planning of long term needs (Arefi, 2014). This is collaborative placemaking as shown in figure 3:

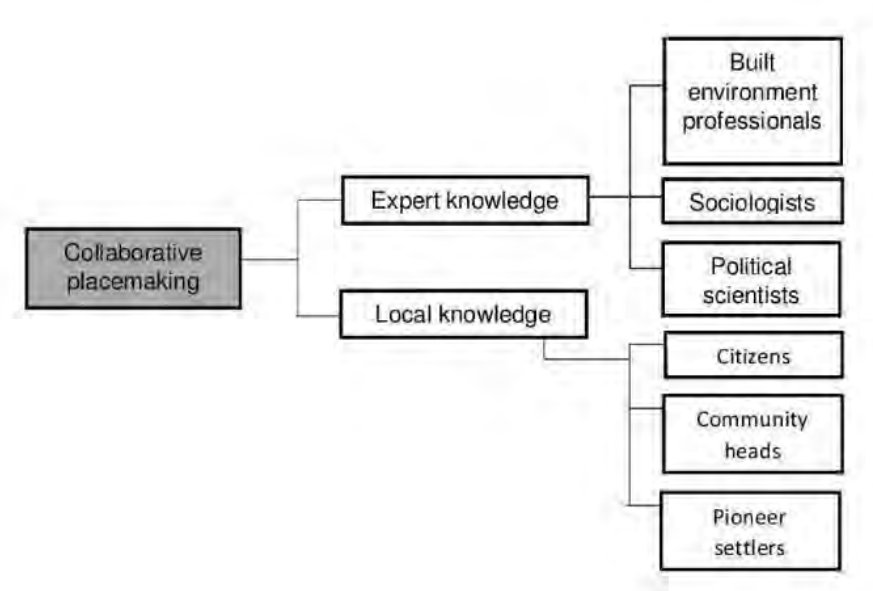


Figure 3: The Collaborative Placemaking (Source: Adapted after Arefi (2014))

4.2 Process of collaborative placemaking (From space to place)

Making better places is a universal activity as people consciously and unconsciously try to shape the places where they live with or without professionals. Schneekloth and Shibley (1995) however argued that professionals can contribute to this unconscious process in a deliberate way in the following three stages: (i) creating a dialogic; (ii) dialectical work of confirmation and interrogation; and (iii) framing action. (Figure 4)

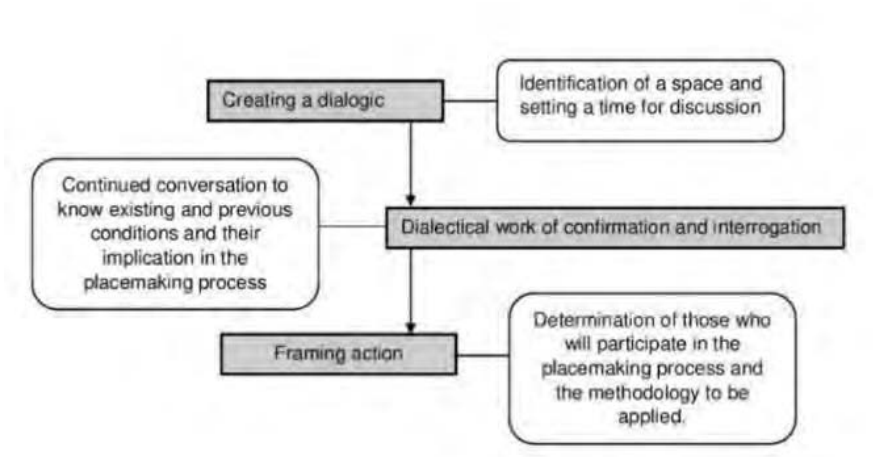


Figure 4: The placemaking process (Source: Adapted after Schneekloth and Shibley (1995))

5. DISCUSSION

The previous sections of this paper provided the theoretical understanding of sustainable neighbourhood planning and collaborative placemaking. This section attempts to establish the nexus between both concepts by examining the question of how well does collaborative placemaking address principle of sustainable neighbourhood planning.

5.1 Needs and assets in sustainable neighbourhood planning

Sustainable neighbourhood planning is driven by the needs which vary from one particular context to another. In neighbourhood planning, there is need to consider the existing assets in terms of physical and social capital and how it be identified, leveraged, and managed. It has been argued that what makes a neighbourhood sustainable is determined by how it has been able to explore its local assets (Gibson et al., 2005).

5.2 Sustainable neighbourhood planning as a long term vision

While progress can be monitored intermittently, the sustainability of a neighbourhood can only be assessed on a long term scale. This can be justified on the basis that sustainability considers both the present and future generations (intergenerational and intragenerational equities). Placemaking is termed to be a ‘work-in-progress’. Plans do evolve and change (as a result of monitoring in the placemaking process) into a more sophisticated and complex one (Arefi, 2014). It is this possibility whereby plans can be reviewed and monitored as a result of the environmental, social, and economic challenges that sustainable settlements evolves.

5.3 Social learning and knowledge sharing

In recent times, attaining sustainable neighbourhoods has gone beyond environmental concerns, as the issue of governance in terms of public participation and engagement have well been advocated for (Brandon and Lombardi, 2011). One of the key objectives of sustainable communities’ skills and knowledge agenda is to transform the closed disciplinary and professional territories and boundaries into open institution landscape (Roberts, 2009). Equitable and sustainable development can be encouraged through placemaking that engages all users (Project for Public Spaces, 2016). That is, an opportunity where social learning and knowledge sharing can be enhanced through the synergy of both local and expert knowledge. This can be actualized through charrette, workshops, and focus groups among others. Also, attempts by an architect to enhance architecture of place will only result to mere artistic statement without consulting and engaging with the local community in evolving solutions.

5.4 Security, local economy, health, and public realm

Undoubtedly, security, local economy, and public realm are key criteria to be considered in assessing the sustainability of a neighbourhood. Placemaking in its process advocates for mixed-used development, walkable neighbourhoods which enhance safety through easy surveillance in the neighbourhood as against the concepts of gated communities and disconnected neighbourhoods noticeable in most developing countries. Collaborative placemaking also has the potential to drive local economy through innovation, usage of local construction materials and workforce while also advocating for business ownership and retail sales centres. In addition, collaborative placemaking prioritise the community needs by ensuring that the neighbourhood planning enhances the physical, mental, and social health of individuals and the entire community (Project for Public Spaces, 2016)

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper attempted to conceptualize a sustainable neighbourhood through collaborative placemaking. The limitations of the contemporary approaches to neighbourhood planning in both the developed and developing countries were discussed which justified the need for a paradigm shift. The placemaking approach that enhances citizens’ engagement in the planning and delivery of the places where they live as against the expert-led contemporary approach was introduced. How this concept could lead to a sustainable neighbourhood was explained in this paper. In order to enhance collaborative placemaking as a solution for 21st century neighbourhood planning challenges, there is need to make its outcomes and delivery clearly visible so as to be well appreciated and recognised. A review of professional ethics and practices is also important by advocating for a behavioural change. Professionals should learn to imbibe the ethics of engaging with local knowledge and non-experts who by their local experience will contribute significantly to their planning and design decisions.

REFERENCES

- [1] AlWaer, H. & Kirk, R., 2015. Matching a community assessment tools to the requirements of practice. Proceedings of the institution of civil engineers: Urban design and planning.
- [2] Arefi, M., 2014. Deconstructing Placemaking. Oxon: Routledge.
- [3] Barton, H., 2000. Conflicting Perceptions of Neighbourhood. In: H. Barton, ed. Sustainable Communities: The Potential for Eco-Neighbourhoods. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, pp. 3-18.
- [4] Barton, H., Grant, M. & Guise, R., 2010. Shaping neighbourhoods for local health and global sustainability. 2nd ed. Oxon: Routledge.
- [5] Berardi, U., 2011. Beyond Sustainability Assessment: Upgrading topics by enlarging the scale of assessment. International Journal of Sustainable Building Technology and Urban Development, Volume 2, pp. 276-282.
- [6] Brandon, P. & Lombardi, P., 2011. Evaluating Sustainability development in the built environment. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- [7] The charter of the new urbanism, The Neighbourhood, the district, and the corridor [Online] Retrieved from: <http://www.cnu.org/who-we-are/charter-new-urbanism> [Retrieved on 14 September 2016]
- [8] Farr, D., 2008. Sustainable urbanism: Urban design with nature. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- [9] Gehl, J., 2010. Cities for people. Washington: Island Press.
- [10] Gehl, J. & Gemzoe, L., 1996. Public spaces, public life. Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press and the RDA of Fine Arts, School of Architecture .
- [11] Gehl, J. & Svarre, B., 2013. How to study public life. Washington: Island Press.
- [12] Gibson, R. et al., 2005. Sustainability Assessment: Criteria, Processes and Application. London: Routledge.
- [13] Girardet, H., 2008. Cities people planet. 2nd ed. Hoboken New Jersey: Wiley.
- [14] Jacobs, J., 1961. The death and life of great American cities. New York: Random House.
- [15] Joss, S. et al., 2015. Tomorrow's City Today: Prospects for Standardising Sustainable Urban Development, London: University of Westminster.
- [16] Komeily, S. & Srinivasan, R., 2015. A need for a balanced approach to
- [17] Neighbourhood Sustainability Assessment. Journal of sustainable cities and society, Volume 18, pp. 32-43.
- [18] Lynch, K., 1960. The image of the city. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- [19] Nickelson, J., Wang, A. R., Mitchell, Q. P., Hendricks, K. & Paschal, A., 2013. Inventory of the physical environment domains and subdomains measured by the neighbourhood audit tools: a systematic literature review. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 36, pp. 179-189.
- [20] Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ODPM, 2004. The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable communities. London, RIBA Enterprises Ltd
- [21] Parlemo, P. & Ponzini, D., 2015. Place-making and Urban Development: New challenges for contemporary planning and design. Oxon: Routledge.
- [22] Roberts, P., 2009. Sustainable communities. In: I. Cooper & M. Symes, eds. Sustainable Urban Development- Changing Professional Practice. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 127-144.
- [23] Rohe, W., 2009. From Local to Global: One hundred Years of Neighbourhood Planning. Journal of the American Planning Association, 75(2), pp. 209-230.
- [24] Sala, S., Ciuffo, B. & Nijkamp, P., 2015. A systemic framework for sustainability assessment. Ecological Economics, Volume 119, pp. 314-325.
- [25] Schneekloth, L. & Shibley, R., 1995. Placemaking: the art and practice of building communities. New York: Wiley.
- [26] Project for public spaces, what is Placemaking? [online] Retrieved from: http://www.pps.org/conference/what_is_placemaking/ [Retrieved on 14 September 2016]
- [27] Wheeler, S., 2013. Planning for Sustainability: Creating livable, equitable and ecological communities. 2nd ed. Oxon: Routledge.
- [28] Whyte, W., 1980. The social life of small urban spaces. New York: Project for public spaces.