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Sustainable Development and Quality of Urban Life

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Abstract

In this paper sustainability and quality of life concept have been evaluated based on quality of life (QoL)researches. With this purpose environmental, economic, social, physical and health related indicators were discussed to contribute to the sustainable development strategies.

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Keywords: Quality of urban life; sustainability; QoL indicators

1. Introduction and theoretical background

The United Nations definition of sustainable city is where achievements in social, economic, and physical development are made to last. A sustainable city maintains a lasting security from environmental hazards that have the potential to threaten development achievements (United Nations, 2001). Only a well organised national, regional and local framework enhances the ability to deliver services and resources. A well informed framework equipped with the data including quality of life assessment, is essential in enhancing the sustainability process. Additionally a thriving city needs to be a healthy environment for human interaction. The World Health Organisation report (1997) describe twenty steps for developing a Healthy Cities project outlines the necessary ingredients that make up a healthy living environment.

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1.1. *Qualities of a Healthy City*

A city should strive to provide:

- A clean, safe physical environment of high quality
 - An ecosystem that is stable now and sustainable in the long term;
 - A strong, mutually supportive and non-exploitive community;
 - A high degree of participation by the public over the decisions affecting their lives, health & wellbeing;
 - The meeting of basic needs (for food, water, shelter, income, safety and work) for all the city's people;
 - Access to a wide variety of experiences and resources, with the chance for a wide variety of contact, interactions and communication;
 - A diverse, vital and innovative city economy;
 - The encouragement of connectedness with the past, with the cultural and biological heritage
 - A form that is compatible with and enhances the preceding characteristics;
 - An optimum level of appropriate public health and care services accessible to all; and
 - High high levels of positive health and low levels of disease
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Source: The World Health Organisation Report (1997)

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. Exploring community and neighbourhood profiles through quality of life research can enhance decision making processes in relation to community and sustainability.

Quality of life (QoL) is a concept that has inspired much research in the past decades and has established a strong position in local, national and European Union agendas (SELMA 2004). The concept has also had a strong influence on social and political trends being applied to a number of fields, such as urban and regional planning, health promotion, disability, social indicators research and economic and mental health research.

The implementation of a credible system of quality of life monitoring equates to a greater understanding of both social and economic trends. This empowers decision makers with the knowledge base required to assess liveability, environmental quality, quality of life, and sustainability in order to develop national, regional, and local resources. Quality of life research can provide the foundations of creating, maintaining, and positively promoting sustainability through implementation of evidence based policy.

The United Nations Agenda 21 Report (1993) states that there is a need to strengthen the scientific basis for sustainable management, and countries need to develop, apply and institute the necessary tools for sustainable development with reference to 'Quality-of-life indicators covering, for example, health, education, social welfare, state of the environment, and the economy' (UN 1993).

Issues relating to quality of life are now high on the political agenda due to an acknowledgement that levels of life quality effects both economic and social wellbeing. That is, issues effecting people's lives are more than purely economically driven and that people in developed countries have begun to realise that quality of life is not necessarily a simple function of material wealth (Pacione, 1993).

Objective measures, or social indicators, represent in a broad sense the individual's standard of living comprising of verifiable conditions inherent in the given cultural unit (Dissart, & Deller, 2000) and are especially useful at the neighbourhood, city, and country levels (Marans, 2003). Subjective quality of life explores the degree to which the individual's life is perceived to match some implicit or explicit internal standard (Dissart, & Deller, 2000). The use of subjective indicators is the most contentious aspect of the quality of life approach. Subjective quality of life illustrates quality of life as indicated by the psychological state of life satisfaction rather than by objective conditions and settings (for example physical, social, and economic settings), although both are inter-related.

The subjective dimension is an important part of quality of life but the measures of that dimension need to be explored and evaluated alongside objective indicators in order to establish their significance. In reviewing the models and definitions within the field of quality of life, environmental quality, liveability, and sustainability, a broad variety of models and definitions have been presented. The central theme in the different approaches is the

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