



## Viewpoint

# ‘Sustainable City’ requires ‘recognition’—The example of environmental education under pressure from the compact city



Maarten Wolsink

University of Amsterdam, Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies, Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018 WV, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 24 March 2015

Received in revised form 6 December 2015

Accepted 16 December 2015

## Keywords:

Urban Green space  
Environmental justice  
Recognition  
Compact City  
Densification  
Education fieldwork

## ABSTRACT

The compact city is advocated as a key strategy to establish sustainable cities. Compact city policy implies urban densification, sometimes with elimination of green space. Citizen's valuable arguments in urban densification developments in green space are easily ignored, as is explored in a case study in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Place making decisions are more often legitimized with sustainability claims, and arguments from less convinced residents are denied or remain unexamined. About green space these also concern environmental qualities significant for long term sustainability of cities. This is illustrated by presenting empirical evidence about environmental education, an argument emerging from the explorative study. Environmental education should be seen as an important element in longterm sustainability, but the educational relevance of proximity of green space to schools had remained unknown. Empirical evidence of the negative effect of larger distances to green space on environmental education is presented in a geographical survey. The results suggest that close proximity to urban green space also reinforces fieldwork activities further away. As the validity of this argument was denied in the case study, this illustrates the need to establish frameworks that foster recognition and learning in open processes in urban densification.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable cities has been debated for more than two decades now. Construction of compact settlements (Jabareen, 2006) – as a tool for limiting energy use in transportation and urban sprawl – is seen as a key element in the sustainable city debate (Jenks et al., 1996). The ‘compact city’ (CC) is characterized by mixed land use and close colocation of buildings, roads, and other infrastructure. The CC is seen as offering economic and social advantages that support sustainability (Burton, 2000); however, the sustainable character of the CC is also challenged (Neuman, 2005), for example because CC policies leave limited space for greenery. This last aspect is quite problematic for the sustainable character of the city. This article will show how the sustainability claim is challenged in a case where green space is eliminated, and citizens who are opposing this feel their stakes and arguments they raise remain unrecognized in the disputes over projects that are legitimized by the densification objective.

Access to green public spaces is important for liveability (Howley et al., 2009), as it safeguards respiratory health and general

well-being (Irvine et al., 2013). As with regards the overall question of equity and justice in the CC (Burton, 2000), the issue of citizens maintaining green spaces also may become one of justice. Although there is tension between environmental justice and sustainability, these concepts are strongly related and must be jointly addressed in urban planning (Agyeman, 2013). ‘Environmental justice’ is a compelling discourse on sustainability in cities, and the quality of public spaces is described as a key element in the concept of ‘just sustainabilities’ in cities (Agyeman et al., 2002). Within the concept of environmental justice, Schlosberg (2004) distinguished three main elements, distributive justice, justice in the process (procedural justice), and justice as recognition. Access to green spaces primarily concerns the distributive justice of allocation, i.e., the location of parks and who can access those (Wolch et al., 2005). However, the pressure on green spaces created by CC policies is felt by all urban residents, and densification projects regularly turn into environmental conflicts (Ruming, 2014). The perceived fairness of decision-making in such conflicts is an essential element of environmental justice, which is about fairness of process and recognition (Schlosberg, 2004) of interests and stakes of affected citizens.

Decisions to establish CC policies, including the abandonment of green spaces, are legitimized with environmental arguments

E-mail address: [M.P.Wolsink@uva.nl](mailto:M.P.Wolsink@uva.nl)

(‘sustainability’). Policies legitimized by these kinds of arguments, tend to downplay counterarguments that also have environmental background. In densification projects there is little recognition of the citizens’ and their organizations’ stake in maintaining green spaces. There are similarities to conflicts about energy, waste and water infrastructure projects, about which policy makers often claim – with legitimate or less legitimate arguments – that they are inspired by environmental concerns. When faced with residential opposition, policymakers presume that there is a ‘gap’ between environmental attitudes held by citizens and lack of support to developments that are legitimized to a significant extent with environmental arguments (Bell et al., 2013; Wolsink, 2010; Davies, 2008).

## 2. Key issue: recognition

In addition to the allocation of green space, the issue of justice concerns the fairness of the process in decision-making about the establishment, location and maintenance of parks. In this process two essential dimensions of environmental justice come to the fore—recognition and participation (Schlosberg, 2004). The key assertion of this article is that in urban densification projects the recognition of the citizen’s valuable contributions are often largely ignored, and the validity of their new (or sometimes previously unnoticed, or deliberately ignored) arguments remains unexamined or underestimated.

Some important but uncommon factors may come to the fore in urban densification disputes. Studies in environmental conflicts usually reveal how important it is that the framework of decision-making supports open decision-making processes, favoring mutual learning among the actors (Sairinen et al., 2010). Learning is, for example, the recognition of previously unnoted aspects and arguments. The issue to be examined in this study is the valuation of green space by citizens, which is considered crucial for environmentally ‘just sustainability’. The central proposition – about the ignorance of recognition of the citizen’s valuable contributions in densification projects – is illustrated with a study concerning one specific – largely ignored – citizens’ argument about environmental education as a significant element of long term urban sustainabil-

ity. An elaboration of this argument follows in an explorative case study of densification in practice in the city of Amsterdam (The Netherlands). This exploration suggests a general relation between green space and environmental education activities. The article continues with a broader geographical study in which this environmental education argument that resulted from the explorative study is tested as a general hypothesis.

## 3. A new argument in densification conflicts

This study will demonstrate that environmental education is heavily depending upon the proximity of public green spaces to schools. This relation between benefits of parks and distance, and consequently the impact of development in green space as part of urban densification, may seem rather obvious (Salazar and Menéndez, 2007), but so far the use of parks for developing sustainability values has been neglected in literature. A recent overview on research questions regarding ecosystem services of green spaces in urban environments, (Niemelä, 2014, p.300) mentions ‘educational possibilities’ as a cultural ecosystem service, next to opportunities for recreation and recuperation from stress, but the issue is not elaborated further, and there is no reference to existing research.

Also prominent in environmental conflicts about space making for developments, including those in which green spaces are eliminated, is the pejorative dismissal of local residents’ objections as only selfish protection of their property values (Wolsink, 2012; Ruming, 2014). However, when people emphasize the value of green spaces this is largely unjustified, as the value of parks for health, respiration, physical exercise, biodiversity is beyond doubt. Maas et al. (2006) revealed general positive health effects, because green space lowers stress levels and provides psychological restoration (Tyrvaainen et al., 2014). Urban green spaces support generally healthier and environmentally friendlier lifestyles, including exercises like walking, and social contacts (Cohen et al., 2007). The latter particularly also applies for children (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003). Green spaces are very important for children’s physical and mental well-being, and they value green public space as much as adults do (Chawla, 2015). The benefit of green space for children is an impor-



Fig. 1. Example (explorative case-study location) of urban densification in Amsterdam based on elimination of green space. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6547448>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6547448>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)