

Chapter 11

Place-Making and Sustainable Community Development

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ABSTRACT

This review chapter explores place-making in terms of how it is linked with sustainable community development (SCD). Place-making as it relates to sustainable community development has not been understood in the practice of sustainability, urban planning, and community development. Here, place-making is a process of planning, designing, managing, and programming spaces to create patterns and activities in cultural, social, economic, and ecological terms to achieve a better quality of life, a prosperous economy, and healthy environment. As informed by research, it can be an approach to sustainability thinking as a strategy for transforming cities and public spaces to promote well-being and prosperity in a local place, urban area, or neighborhood. In the long-term, the theory and practice of sustainable community development relative to place-making will evolve and eventually produce well-grounded meanings and conceptualizations as we engage in more research on sustainability and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of place-making and sustainability have been contested within research and practice in community sustainability. One of the most important things about sustainability as a development concept is the claim that the economy and the environment are inextricably linked (Hopkins, 2013; Lempert & Nguyen, 2008; Martin & Mayer, 2008; Mayer, 2008). To have economic growth and sustainability

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is to say that we understand the need to find the balance between sustainability and economic development. Sustainability remains at the center of discursive terrain in research and policy debates in the global environment and development arena. Invariably, sustainability is characterized by three pillars (social, economic and environmental) (Hempel 1999; Goodland 1995). If expressed differently, the idea of ‘sustainability’ is well-positioned in terms of the ‘triple bottom line’ comprising the economy, the environment and society in discursive narratives about place-making in urban areas, towns and places. Although there is a critical need to examine place-making and community sustainability, we have yet to understand how they are linked together in shaping the planet’s future. By examining how place-making is defined, it informs environmental thinkers, researchers, policy makers and leaders in the industry and sustainability science of its relationship with community sustainability. Despite burgeoning literature, the relationship between ‘place-making’ and sustainable community development is unclear in conceptual sense whether they overlap, diverge or exhibit a shared interest within the science of sustainability. As such, this is the lacuna that the current interest on community sustainability study seeks to fill.

While there is dynamism in sustainability as an expanding field, the spatial dimension for policy decisions and actions in place-making has been neglected in sustainability thinking. The question is this: How does place-making create or influence sustainability? Towns, cities and municipalities are pivotal to development as they contribute 85% of gross national product in high-income countries (Friedman, 2010; Keivani, 2010). In the South, concerns on urban problems such as rising population, environmental degradation and resource scarcity have been identified (Keivani, 2010; Drakakis-Smith, 1995). In the North, cities continue to build massive infrastructure and initiate projects that reflect a complex picture of contradiction and fragmentation rather than a promise of sustainability (Williams, 2009). Since cities are places of cultural and social interaction as well as centers of political and economic power, it is important to consider their myriad challenges to sustainability (Keivani, 2010). With parallel issues on environmental degradation and world poverty, the poor in the developing countries are primarily concerned with earning a living than caring for the environment (Keivani, 2010; Drakakis-Smith, 1995). On the environmental front, cities are the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions affecting the world climate (Keivani, 2010). In economic terms, cities and towns in Canada and elsewhere have placed emphasis on municipal investments, growth of local economies and community development alternatives in pushing for economic prosperity and sustainability (Turvey, 2015). Although it is essential to deal with questions of ‘what’ or ‘who’ is to be sustained, the question of ‘where’ and/or ‘which

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