

Chapter 1

The Role of Social Media in Public Involvement: Pushing for Sustainability in International Planning and Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores social media's potential to enhance public involvement to pursue sustainable practices on an international scale across planning and development projects. Using a case-study approach, the international institutions of the World Bank, UN-Habitat, Unilever, and World Business Council for Sustainable Development are investigated. The relationship between public versus the institutions' intake on sustainability is examined. Findings identify strong public push for increased sustainability in international development and show evidence of the ways in which international institutions respond to the public. Contributing to the social media research field, it offers an alternative application to the planning profession via e-planning. This could contribute to an extended form of public engagement through social media that goes beyond the limiting geographical borders of each local community, and assesses planning and development projects for their broader sustainability implications on an international platform.

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INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

The widely accepted definition of sustainable development/practice by Brundtland (1987) is development/practice that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This has traditionally been interpreted on a local level, by analyzing local impacts and intergenerational equality. However, the rapid onset of globalization via multilateral trade negotiations over the last few decades has brought about an unprecedented increase in the local consumption of globally sourced goods and services. This definition of sustainable development detaches local planning, development, and resourcing from the issues of international inequality (AntonioDuro, 2012; Milanovic, 2011; Willard, 2009).

It is argued that the progress towards sustainable practice at an international level has been infrequent and inconsistent (Aras & David Crowther, 2009; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Marsden (2000) outlines the wide variation in progress may be attributed to three distinct attitudes towards organizational uptake of sustainable practices:

- **Denial:** Placing responsibility on the government;
- **Reaction:** Acceptance as a contributor to the problem and taking guidance on solutions; and
- **Autonomous Action:** Recognition of power and proactive, independent acts.

Organizations in the reaction or autonomous response categories often utilize new forms of business models that have hybridized corporate and organizational strategy with sustainability and gained a competitive advantage in the market. The traditional business models, on the other hand, were mainly ruled by the economic system with only minor tradeoffs for social or environmental capital gain (Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008). Two major concepts arose in the literature in response to balancing this, namely 'corporate social responsibility' and 'corporate environmental responsibility/corporate sustainability' (Fernando, 2012; Montiel, 2008; Svensson & Wagner, 2010; Willard, 2009). In many cases though, the extent of these efforts are dictated by the organizations and vary greatly. Numerous international examples of over-consumption of local environmental resources, tax avoidance, and social injustices (Cerro Santamaria, 2013; Crane & Matten, 2016; Huang & Hsu, 2003) represent a disturbing level of ingenuity in the corporate sustainability agenda (Aras & Crowther, 2009). More recently, a growing line of critical scholarship has focused on the international corporations' philanthropic efforts, especially at the international level (Alizadeh, 2017; Gautier & Pache, 2015; McNeill, 2015; Paroutis, S., Bennett, M., & Heracleous, L., 2014). A particular focus has been on how firms have tried to influence national and urban governments, while engaging in providing philanthropic services (Kitchin, 2015). Critics argue that in many cases firms gain so much out of their involvement that do not fit with a pure pro bono, philanthropic model (Hack, 2013; McNeill, 2015). This line of argument suggests that new tools are required to bring organizations' international involvement with local projects to a global stage in a push for sustainable practice.

This chapter is an exploratory study into the potential of social media, as a new tool with the ability to give local level issues a global audience, in short time periods, to enhance public involvement and sustainable practices on an international scale across planning and development projects. Using a comparative case-study approach, the supply-demand relationship - on social media - for sustainable practice is examined. Building upon the literature, the chapter examines the virtually sourced data to discover how internationally renowned development and manufacturing organizations react to, or align with public

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