

Wellbeing and urban planning

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Master in Science in Regional development planning and Management, Joint degree from Technische Universität, Dortmund, Germany and Universidad Austral de Chile, Valdivia, Chile,
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Problem Statement:

In the globalized world neo-liberal urbanisation is widely implored and cities are exploring harmonizing ways to enhance the wellbeing of their citizens. Various think tanks and civil societies have been long advocating for a shift in the economic framework from growth to wellbeing (Donella H Meadows, 1973). In the view of economic crisis, the shift to wellbeing from growth looks very likely (Padoan, 2013). Health and Wellbeing is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals declared by the UN. With this perspective, this paper aims at understanding what does wellbeing mean in the context of urban planning, historically and in the 21st century.

John Snow's mapping of London in 1854 is one the landmark moments of modern urban planning which was followed by the works of Patrick Geddes (Schwab, 1992) (Hall, 2014). Both these works focused on improving the overall quality of life in human settlements. This momentum was later changed into the modernist planning of Le Corbusier (and others) that drove the urbanization around the western world for much of the first half of 20th Century (Harvey, 1990). The classic ideological tug of war surrounding the urban planning of New York between Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses marks the landmark moment of the arrival of postmodernist planning, which was further advanced by David Harvey (Harvey, 1990). These landmark moments can be seen as

the consecutive paradigm shifts in the understanding wellbeing in urbanization. With the advancement of technology and arrival of new challenges of sustainability and climate change, the wellbeing debate in urbanization is witnessing another significant turn through the work of pioneers like Manuel Castalles (Castalles, 1997). The notion of wellbeing has been shifting all this while and the debate on defining it in the 21st century amid all these changes and challenges is still raging. The first year of my Doctoral research focused on studying these theories and synthesizing them from the perspective of wellbeing and adding to this ongoing debate.

This research is theoretical in spirit with the underlying objective of adding to the applied side of urban planning as a discipline through multidisciplinary research. Life in cities is a very complex and dynamic process, and numerous fields of study/research go into it to make our collective life experience better. Urban planning as a discipline (like many others) is in the progress of understanding this vast network and finding how various (apparently disjoint) disciplines can come together to collaborate toward the same objective, i.e. to make life worth living. Therefore this research ventures into the related aspects from other disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, economics and psychology, and aims at combining these from the perspective of urban planning.

Objective:

1. How the notion of wellbeing has been covered historically by different planning theories.
2. To understand what does the notion of wellbeing stand for urban planning in the 21st century, in terms of policies and practices.

Methodology:

The first part of paper deals with the understanding of wellbeing from a very trans-disciplinary perspective including the philosophical, psychological, health, financial and sociological constructs of wellbeing.

The second part of paper analyzes the focus major planning theories post industrial revolution from the perspective of wellbeing. This leads to the third part of the paper that deals extensively with the modernist and post-modernist planning theories.

Main Results:

Based on these three parts and the ongoing discussion the academia and planning world, the fourth part tries to underline what wellbeing for cities in 21st centuries may mean and finally paper ends with the policy and practice manifestation of this research which hopefully would contribute positively toward the enhancement of wellbeing in cities (with European cities in focus).

Bibliography

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