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The Interrelationship of Social Sustainability and Urban Form; the Case of Modern and Traditional Iranian Cities

Authors : Ahmadreza Hakiminejad, Changfeng Fu, Hamideh Mohammadzadeh Titkanlou

Abstract : For decades, sustainable development has been an imperative concern in the process of urban development of the world's developed countries. Despite the fact that the concept of sustainability, primarily, emerged by virtue of warning over global environmental catastrophes, it subsequently led to the ongoing debates not only over environmental, but also economic and sociocultural issues involved. This study, particularly, discusses the constituents of social sustainability- as one of the three pillars of sustainable development- and its situation within an urban context. It tries to investigate the interrelationships between the elements of social sustainability and the quality of physical environment. The paper, firstly, depicts a theoretical overview of the notions of social sustainability and urban form. Secondly, it will discuss the interrelationship between the two. And lastly, it will investigate and analyse this interrelationship through the historical transformation of Iranian cities. The research aims to answer this very question that how the urban form within the context of the built environment can influence the social behaviors so as to achieve a more sustainable society. It is to examine how and why compact, high-density and mixed-use urban patterns are environmentally sound, efficient for transport, socially beneficial and economically viable. The methodology used in this paper is desk research. Thus, the documents from different urban related disciplines including urban planning, urban design, urban sociology and urban policy have been reviewed. The research has also applied a comparative approach to discuss and analyse the impacts of different urban forms on the elements of social sustainability within the context of modern and traditional Iranian cities. The paper concludes with an examination of possible future directions of Iranian cities with consideration to socio-cultural concepts and the challenges that will have to be overcome to make progress towards social sustainability.

Keywords : social sustainability, urban form, compact city, Iranian cities

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