INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE CITY

YASMINE EL GHOUAT

Faculty of Human and Social Sciences Kenitra, Laboratory: Territory, Environment and Development.
Email: yasmine.elghouat@uit.ac.ma

FAYCAL FATAH

Faculty of Human and Social Sciences Kenitra, Laboratory: Territory, Environment and Development.
Email: faycal.fatah@uit.ac.ma

Abstract

The high rate of urbanization witnessed in the 21 st century has increased the pressure in seeking cities that not only are economically vibrant but also greener, socially inclusive and sustainable. An inclusive and sustainable city is a city which makes accessible opportunities, resources and basic services to all its citizens regardless of their gender, old-age, disability, income and cultural backgrounds whilst at the same time advancing environmental stewardship as well as resilience. In the paper, the author investigates the intersection between inclusivity and sustainability as two principles of an urban development. It identifies the significance of participatory governance, affordable housing, effective public transport system, green infrastructure, and the digital world in creating the equitable urban environment. It further looks at the issues of increased inequality, environmental degradations and climatic changes, and suggests strategic opportunities of developing cities that are resilient, just and adaptive. With the encouragement of inclusivity in tandem to sustainability, cities can become means of prosperity that guarantee human dignity, social equity and sustainability to the current and future generations.

Keywords: Inclusive Cities, Sustainable Urban Development, Social Equity, Green Infrastructure, Participatory Governance.
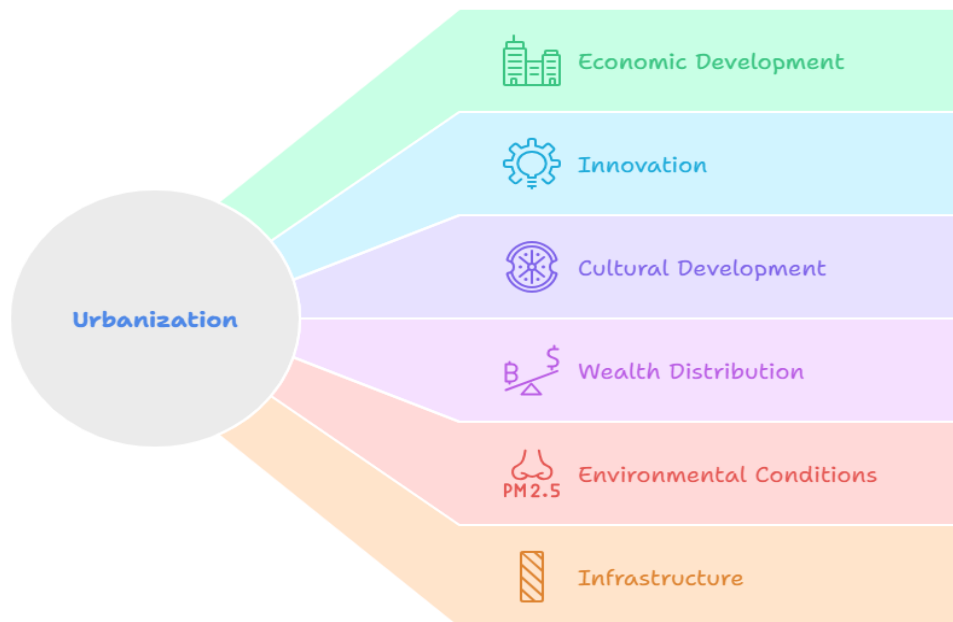
INTRODUCTION

The current 21st century has been characterized by massive urbanization as more than 55 percent of the world population currently lives in urban centers and this number is expected to grow to 68 percent by 2050 (United Nations, 2019).

This fast urbanization both creates opportunities as well as challenges to the sustainable development. Due to their vast population, cities have been a source of economic, innovation, and cultural development but are also associated with inconsistent distribution of wealth, poor environmental conditions, and insufficient infrastructure (World Bank, 2020).

An inclusive and sustainable city is one which provides all its inhabitants with equitable entry into resources, services and opportunities in addition to protecting the environment against future exploitation. Inclusivity requires that social and spatial inequality should be eradicated so that the disadvantaged groups (women, the very old, persons with disabilities and low-income earners) are not left behind (UN-Habitat, 2020). In the meantime, sustainability implies promoting urban resilient by means of resources management efficiency, green infrastructures, and climate change resilience measures (Elmqvist et al., 2019).

Exploring the Multifaceted Impact of Urbanization

What is especially noteworthy is the fact that the attempts to establish inclusive and sustainable cities are directly related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11): to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and finally, sustainable (United Nations, 2015). This objective makes integrated solutions that link social equality, financial success, and ecological responsibility more important. The construction of such cities needs participatory democracy, creative urban planning, cheap housing, and effective transportation in addition to encouraging green and digital infrastructure (Pojani & Stead, 2015).

Thus, the paper is going to analyze how an inclusive and sustainable approach to urban development can be integrated, and what consistency and struggles this approach must go through.

LITERARURE REVIEW

The notion of inclusive and sustainable cities has gained a substantial amount of scholarly focus in the recent decades especially when it comes to rapid urbanization and global sustainability problems. Researchers believe that the concepts of inclusivity and sustainability cannot be separated, and a combination of techniques is needed to achieve fair distribution of opportunities to all people without sacrificing the environment (Elmqvist et al., 2019).

Inclusive Cities

Inclusivity in urban development puts an emphasis on the minimization of inequality and on ensuring that the urban growth benefits all urban residents regardless of income, gender, disability, or ethnicity. The variants of an inclusive city that are mentioned according to the UN-Habitat (2020) are based on the notion that the city must guarantee the access to affordable housing, to the community of public facilities, and to secure spaces, as well as encourage participatory governance. Cities not taking action to combat exclusion face a danger of intensifying social differences and strengthening the threads of poverty and marginalization (Fainstein, 2014).

Sustainable Cities

In the city sense, sustainability is the combination of economics, social development and environmental provision in a balanced form -it is also sometimes seen as the art of living well in the city. Researchers underline that sustainable city ensure green infrastructure, energy efficient techniques, and urban resilience against climates (Newman, Beatley, & Boyer, 2017). Further, the ways to lessen carbon emission by implementing smart technologies and the principles of environmentally friendly transport systems are recognized as important to enhancing the urban environment (Pojani & Stead, 2015).

The City of Inclusivity and Sustainability Once was

Recently, it has been stressed that inclusivity and sustainability are not pursuable as single entities. To give a few examples, the environmentally sustainable policy (green transitions, climate adaption policies, etc.) needs to take social justice into account to prevent any new sources of exclusion (Anguelovski et al., 2016).

Similarly, participatory urban governance was found to increase both inclusivity and sustainability due to the fact that this approach promotes the involvement of marginalized communities in the process of decision-making (Agyeman, 2013).

International Policy frameworks

The international policy framework also explains why this twofold approach matters. United Nations goal 11 clearly states that the world needs to create inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, New Urban Agenda is skewed on the integration plan which embraces equity, social integration, and environmental pollination (United Nations, 2017).

In a nutshell, a general understanding of the literature reveals that the development of inclusive and sustainable cities needs a comprehensive approach that entails fair social policies, green infrastructures, participatory governance practice, and innovative planning.

Those gaps, however, could be found in the application of these principles, which is of great concern in high-growth cities of the Global South, where inequality and environmental degradation are still pressing issues (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The research method applied in the study is qualitative with document analysis as well as case study comparison. The research methodology aims to examine the overlap of inclusivity and sustainability in urban development through the review of presented literature concerning the topic, international policies, and case studies of cities with experience of using inclusive and sustainable processes.

Research Design

The research has a descriptive and exploratory design because its purpose is to synthesize the existing knowledge and to determine the best practice.

The secondary sources were consulted, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, reports of international bodies (e.g., UN-Habitat, World Bank), and so-called case studies of designated cities.

Data Collection

Academic libraries where the secondary data were sought include Scopus, the Web of Science, and Google Scholar. With a period of publication between 2010 and 2023, inclusion criteria were those studies that mentioned urban inclusivity, sustainability, or both. Reports of international agencies were also taken into account in order to have a global outlook.

Data Analysis

Proceedings were analyzed using a thematic content analysis to determine the repetitive themes, issues, and strategies. Themes were classified into the level of inclusivity, a sustainable perspective, and the combination of the two facets. Comparative analysis of the case studies (examples include Curitiba, copenhagen, Lagos) were utilized to point out variations in the approaches applied in different socio-economic ramifications.

Table 1: Summary of Research Methodology

Component	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive
Data Sources	Secondary data: academic journals, books, policy reports, case studies
Data Collection	Literature review (2010–2023), reports from UN-Habitat, World Bank, and OECD
Analysis Technique	Thematic content analysis, case study comparison
Case Study Examples	Curitiba (Brazil), Copenhagen (Denmark), Lagos (Nigeria)
Key Themes Explored	Inclusivity, sustainability, governance, infrastructure, resilience

RESULT

Some of the key findings emerged in the context of the quest towards inclusive and sustainable cities under the secondary analysis of data and the case study.

Inclusivity and Sustainability Integration Is Ineven

Findings reveal that the majority of the cities are active in sustainability practices but inclusivity is not prioritized. One such example is that in such cities of Europe as Copenhagen, green policies and green infrastructure contribute to the environmental sustainability; but the opponents claim that green policies are at times linked to social exclusion by raising housing prices (Anguelovski et al., 2016). Cities in the Global South, such as Lagos are more focused on making cities inclusive, in terms of housing and introducing the informal sector, but generally, they are likely to face challenges in terms of future long-term sustainable planning (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014).

Effective Governance and Involvement is a Determinant of Success

Participatory governance emerged in the limelight as one of the necessary requirements to develop inclusive and sustainable urban systems. In places like Curitiba in Brazil where direct involvement of the citizens in transport and environmental planning was introduced, it came to be known to lead to social equity besides ecological resilience (Rabinovitch, 1992). Similarly, in Medellin, Colombia, participatory planning has brought out enhanced security, ease of access, and enhanced trust to the population in the local government (Maclean, 2015).

The Big Issues Are Infrastructure and Accessibility

The statistics show that the global community is grappling with equitable availability of affordable housing, quality transport system and requisite amenities. The unplanned sprawls in the accelerating urbanizing regions will relegate the underprivileged to poor access to official infrastructure, then relegate the underprivileged to vulnerable positions to environmental risks (UN-Habitat, 2020).
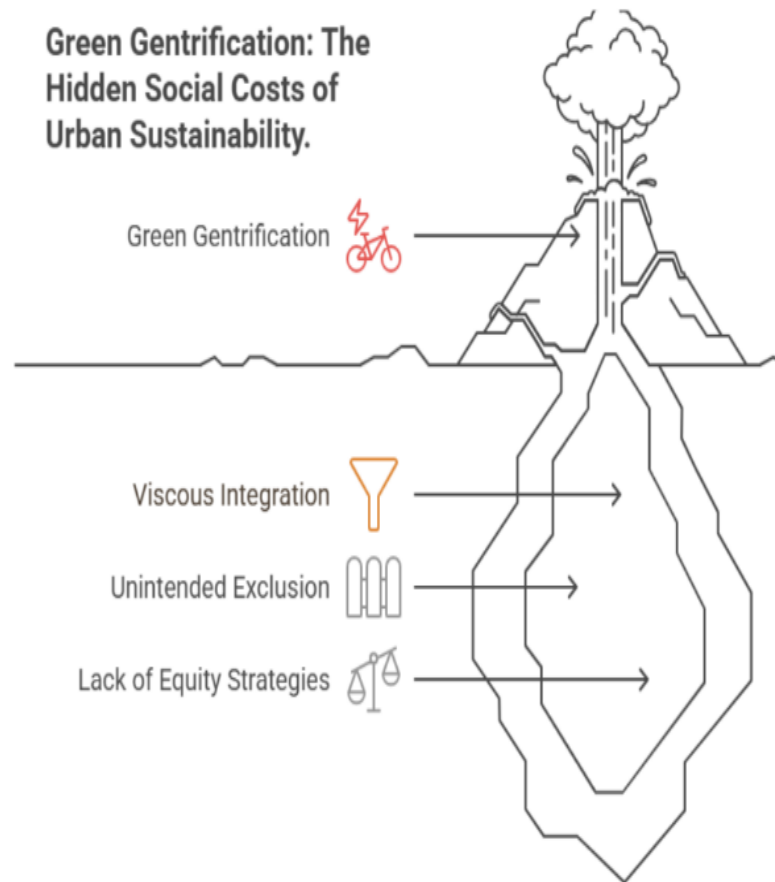
Policy Frames Offer - But Not Everything

Cities have now been provided with guidance on how to grow inclusively and sustainably by global programs such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11) and the New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2015; 2017). However, the realization gaps remain as a few particularly in low-income economies because of the limited financial and institutional capacity to support effective urban governance (World Bank, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study prove the fact that inclusiveness and sustainability of cities is a complicated phenomenon to shape. The one-sided integration of inclusiveness and sustainability confirms past researches, which propose that the two are not integrated in a synthesized way but in a viscosity way (Elmqvist et al., 2019).

Even in such cities as Copenhagen, which were already at the top of environmental sustainability in terms of investment in renewable energy and green transportation systems, such strategy has sometimes led to the reverse, i.e., in this case, the exclusion of the healthcare sector, which can be termed as green gentrification in the framework of sustainability (Anguelovski et al., 2016).

This is because in order to have a positive environmental development, there must exist strategic social equity strategies to take note of so that social balance is not being lost.

Similarly, to evidence, we observe an inverse trend in Global South cities. The Lagos priority is inclusivity through expanding informal housing and promoting informal economies but, due to the lack of funds and appropriate institutions, the city lacks the ability to introduce permanency into the metropolitan plan (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014). This analogy demonstrates that inclusivity and the idea of sustainability are also contextual and yet, should be addressed personally, but not in general terms.

The governance turned out to be one of the success factors and it proves that the participatory approaches contribute to the realization not only of equity but also of resilience (Agyeman, 2013).

The above case of the city of Curitiba demonstrates that when citizens are included in the decision-making process, the citizens will have a sense of ownership and this will lead to establishment of sustainable urban transport and green space systems that will allow all citizens to share (Rabinovitch, 1992).

The same can be said about the participatory budgeting and community involvement in Medellin: it is a manifestation of how governance innovation can be more inclusionary since they contribute to the sustainability goals simultaneously (Maclean, 2015).

Despite the existence of such guiding frameworks as Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, gaps in practice still exist. These findings reflect the argument that the global templates tend to be goal-rich but lack much consideration of implementation in under-resourced settings (World Bank, 2020; United Nations, 2017). This heightens the need to augment the budgetary and capacity resources and more contextual initiatives to transfer international policies to local settings.

Overall, the discussion indicates that only with the help of the integrated strategies that will even out social, environmental, and economic will inclusive and sustainable cities exist. Equity-based sustainability should be the priority in urban planning in the future whereby the technological innovation should be coupled with people-oriented governance and an elastic policy measure.

Table 2: Key Findings and Their Implications

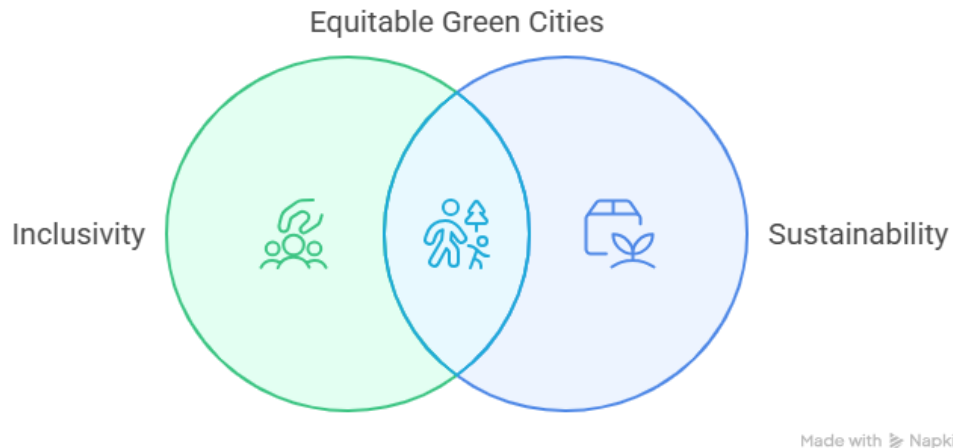| Key Finding	Implication for Cities
Sustainability often prioritized over inclusivity	Risk of "green gentrification"; need to combine environmental progress with social justice
Inclusivity prioritized in Global South cities, but sustainability is weak	Cities must balance immediate social needs with long-term ecological planning
Participatory governance enhances success	Inclusion of citizens in planning builds trust, ownership, and long-term resilience
Infrastructure and accessibility challenges persist	Investment in affordable housing, transport, and services is essential for equity
Policy frameworks provide guidance but face gaps	Need for localized strategies, financial support, and capacity-building for effective action

CONCLUSSION

This paper has examined the interrelation between inclusivity and sustainability as the key elements of the urban development process.

Guidance findings show that although cities have since achieved success in promoting sustainability via green infrastructure, climatic resilience, and post-modern planning, inclusivity tends to have a lower priority, causing social inequalities that include green gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2016).

Cities in the Global South, e.g., Lagos, are also committed to inclusivity in housing and informal sector integration, but experience difficulty in incorporating long-term environmental sustainability because of institutional and financial shortcoming (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014).

The Sweet Spot of Inclusive Sustainable Urban Development

The analysis vindicates the claim that participatory governance becomes a key aspect to delivering the case of inclusive and sustainable cities. Based on the examples of Curitiba and Medell n, citizen preparation is crucial in terms of having not only equal results but also increasing the resilience and trust in the urban management (Rabinovitch, 1992; Maclean, 2015).

These results confirm that inclusivity and sustainability must not be addressed as individual plans but should only be implemented concurrently to ensure that cities become equitable, sustainable, and more environmentally responsible (Elmqvist et al., 2019).

In addition, although efforts to address the sustainability agenda at the international level via Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the New Urban Agenda still appreciably facilitate progress, their overall impact is curbed by implementation lags, especially in resource-limited locales (United Nations, 2015; 2017; World Bank, 2020).

This therefore requires that cities should localise these frameworks by implementing context-specific strategies with the support of appropriate funding, development of institutional capacities, and innovative governance models.

In sum, more inclusive and sustainable cities need to find common ground between social demand in the short term and environmental principles for the future.

The way ahead is to ensure that policies on equity, participatory governance and adaptive strategies on sustainability are integrated so that urban locations continue to be a wellspring of prosperity, equity and resilience, now and onwards.

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